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JACK PICKED UP THE CHILD AND PASSED IT OVER TO HANS.

FIREFLY JACK THE RIVER-RAT DETECTIVE

OR,

A QUEER CASE.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,
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DICK," "PICAYUNE PETE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A BIG FISH AMONG THE SPLATTERS.

IT was a clear, bright day in mid April. The sun shone bright in the heavens, and poured his rays warmly on the waters of the broad river, that lay in a deep calm below. It was the noble Delaware, here more than a mile in width, and dotted with vessels and steamboats, all busily pllying on their many errands, like carrier pigeons of the seas.

Like a minnow among the big fish, was a small boat that sped through the lines of these great craft, impelled by two pairs of oars.

The rowers were a pair of well-grown boys. It needed no second glance to tell that they were not the sons of gentlemen. Their clothes were

much the worse for wear and their faces not particularly clean, yet they looked as well satisfied with themselves as if they had been worth millions.

The one who seemed the older was a well-built lad, with a shrewd and intelligent face, a keen-looking specimen of the street Arab, who was certainly quite able to take care of himself.

His companion was a chunky youngster, with a broad, Dutch face, and little twinkling eyes. To all appearance he was as stupid as the other was sharp.

The boys had been rowing for an hour. They were several miles below the city of Philadelphia, whose spires were visible in the distance, gleaming bright in the afternoon sun.

A brace of fishing-rods in the boat, and a ragged basket, with a half-dozen fish in it, showed the errand of the young navigators.

"Yander's the spot, Dutchy," cried the older boy, pointing into a thick growth of water plants, by the river-side. "Pull in lively."

"Sure der's fish in dere?" asked the other, with a strong German accent.

"You bet I am! Don't s'pose I'm a monkey, do ye? Calkerlate I go fishin' fur pearch in a mud-hole? Not much, I guess. Best go soak yer head, softy."

"S'pose der ain't no harm in askin', Jack?" demanded Dutchy, in an injured tone.

"Now see here, Hans. I told ye a'ready that I hauled up a mess o' catties in ten minutes 'mong them splatter docks. Reckon I ain't goin' to waste all my breath tellin' it. Pull in, and shut yer traps!"

They had been heading toward the shore as they talked. The boat was now close to the line of thick water-weeds, that rose here through the shallow waters, skirting the river as far as could be seen.

"Guess this is the hunky place; just outside the splatters," remarked Jack, pulling in his oars, and picking up his rod.

In a few minutes the hooks were baited, and the lines thrown into the water. The current here was very slight, and the boat was allowed to drift slowly along.

Not two minutes passed before Jack had a bite. Within the next minute he hooked his fish, and drew up a well-grown, white-breasted catfish.

"Didn't b'lieve me, Dutchy, did ye?" he cried in triumph. "Thought I was baitin' ye with Limberger cheese? Look at that beauty and weep! Spry about, youngster, you've got a nibble yourself."

During the next hour they continued to fish industriously. By that time they had caught a neat show of catfish and perch, of which Jack had caught three to Hans's one. He seemed to have the knack of coaxing the fish out of the water.

By this time they had drifted about a half-mile down the river. The fishing here became poorer.

"Guess we'd best row in 'mong the splatters," suggested Jack. "Sometimes they crowd in there out o' the wet."

"Out o' der wet!" cried Hans, in wonder. "Ain't der water wet in dere too? Don't yer be pokin' no fun at me, Firefly Jack. 'Cause I don't likes dot."

"Who's funnin'?" demanded Jack sharply. "You git on yer ear too easy, Dutchy. Any fool'd know ther' ain't as much room fur water where ther's weeds. Now snatch yer oars, and don't expose yer ignorance."

Hans looked at him in stupid wonder. He knew there was something wrong somewhere, but he couldn't see just where.

"I dunno. I s'pose it's dot," he said helplessly, as he took up his oars.

The sharp bow of the boat quickly divided the clustered leaves. At some distance within they could see a space of clear water, and toward this they headed.

In two or three minutes they had broken through the intervening screen. The prow of the boat cut the clear water within.

Jack rose to ship his oars. But at that instant a strange sound struck his ears, giving him such a start that he nearly tumbled overboard.

"What dot?" ejaculated Hans.

It was like the cry of a frightened child, a shrill, sharp, babyish yell.

It was quickly repeated, and seemed to come from the clump of weeds to their left.

"Wonder if it's a duck?" queried Jack.

"Never heered 'em make such a noise as that."

"Le's go," said Dutchy, with a white look in his fat face. "I don't like dem dings."

"You're skeered, you are."

"I ain't skeered, but I don't like dem dings."

The cry was at this instant repeated. It was marvelously like that of a baby.

Jack stood upright on the seat of the boat, and looked over the reeds toward the spot it came from.

"Ther's somethin' there, Hans," he answered. "Can't just make it out, 'cause the weeds is too high and thick that way. But I kin see somethin' black."

He seized one of his oars and began to use it as a pushing-pole.

"Not dat way!" cried Hans in alarm. "T'other way! Don't want ter go dat way, where der spook is!"

He snatched an oar, and began to push in the opposite direction.

Jack ceased his efforts, and looked at him for a minute, with a grim smile on his sharp face.

"Do ye know what my name is, Dutchy?" he asked quietly.

"Der boys calls yer Firefly Jack," faltered Hans.

"Reckon you don't know why?"

"'Cause ye'r' so quick wid der fist, maybe, I dunno."

"Ye soon will know then, if ye don't drop that oar instanter. Out with it, you Bolony sausage, or I'll plant you in the mud, head down and feet up, fur catfish bait. D'y'e hear?"

Hans looked up at the resolute speaker. There was something in Jack's face he didn't like. He slowly drew in the oar.

"That's sensible. Now plug it down ag'in and push the right way. I'm going to see what that thing is, or somethin' ll bu'st. And if it's a ghost I hope it'll chaw your ear off. You deserve it, fur a Dutch blunderhead."

Hans obeyed. But just as he put his oar into the water there came a repetition of the cry. He fell over limply, thrusting the oar deep into the mud. It was only this that saved him from taking a header into the water.

Jack looked at him, with a laugh, but said nothing.

The boat was now pushing into the weeds. They were thick here, and needed hard work to force a way through. Hans was quite as much afraid of Jack as he was of the spook, and kept his oar at work.

Jack took a look ahead.

"By the blazin' Jiminy, I b'lieve it's a boat," he exclaimed. "And I'll go my head ther's a baby in it fer ballast."

On they went, through the weeds.

It thinned out ahead, and showed a channel of clear water. Into this they soon made their way.

A single glance now revealed the situation of affairs. Before them lay a medium-sized skiff pushed in among the thick-leaved docks.

It seemed to have floated in from the river, by the open channel in which they lay, until stranded in the spot where they found it.

But the boys just now had no eyes for this. They stood looking with open-eyed amazement at the boat.

"Mein Gott! who ever heered of der like?" ejaculated Hans.

"Jehosaphat and Jeremiah! it's enough to give a monkey the ramjams," cried Jack, with equal astonishment.

They had abundant reason for their wonder.

The source of the childlike screams they had heard was now very evident.

There lay in the boat a child of some two or three years of age, crying bitterly, and occasionally breaking into a startling scream.

Beneath, and closely hugged by this child, lay a woman.

Her face was turned upward, and revealed a countenance of great beauty. She was apparently quite young, and of a well-molded, attractive form.

But it was her situation that attracted the boy's open-eyed wonder. Her feet and hands were tied, and the ends of the ropes firmly fastened to the sides of the boat.

A tightly-rolled handkerchief was thrust into her mouth as a gag.

The boat was half-full of water. It seemed to have been scuttled, and evidently preparations made to sink it, with its living freight, for a large and heavy stone was visible at each end, quite heavy enough to carry it to the bottom.

The two boys looked at each other. Hans was whiter than when he thought the cry came from a ghost. Jack's eyes glittered with excitement. There was a stern look on his intelligent face.

"What you got to say, Hans?" he asked, in a half-whisper.

"I dinks not'ing, unt derefore I says not'ing," returned Hans. "I dunno if my pain is in der head or der heels."

"It's murder, that's what it is! Some coon's been tryin' to git rid o' that woman and that baby. Come mighty nigh it, too. It's a cute trick, by Jiminy!"

"What you dinks, anyhow?"

"What do I thinks? Why, I thinks some galoot's tied the woman the way you see here, dug a hole through the bottom of the boat, and piled them stones in to sink it. And a mighty pooty lady she is, too."

"But what bringed der boat here?"

"Why, it drifted here, that's what. I s'pose they didn't make the hole big enough. And the lady's clothes must plug it up, so's the water couldn't come in fast. Reckon the wind last night driv the boat inter this openin' and it got landed on the dock-leaves afore it could sink. It's only them leaves as saved the poor lady's life."

"She looks deat," returned Hans. "Her face am white as der snow. And her eyes am shet tight. I wonder if dey kilt her first and drowned her after?"

"The bloody murderers!" cried Jack, with a burst of indignation. "There'll be ructions when this biz gits out in the city, Hans. It's better than catchin' catties."

At this moment the child, who seemed to have been quieted by the murmur of voices so near, broke out again into a loud and distressing wail.

"Gitting tired out, I reckon," cried Jack, catching his oar and pushing close to the stranded boat, which appeared to be resting on the stems of the water-plants. "We'll have to git 'em to the city somehow. Ther' mought be a reward, Hans."

"If der is, we'll go snooks," answered the Dutch boy, with a look of avarice.

He seized an oar to help. The possible chance of reward had roused him up.

In a minute they were alongside the stranded boat. Jack leaned over and took the child in his hands. He lifted, but the baby failed to come. An exclamation broke from his lips.

"If they ain't got the kid tied down, too, I'm a donkey! They was bound ther shouldn't be no driftwood. Wouldn't they feel blue, though, if they know'd how the thing's turned out? Ain't seen the end o' this biz yit, nowow."

A sharp cut with his knife, and the child was free. He picked it up, and passed it over to Hans.

"Snatch on to the little 'un, Dutchy. And don't let it drop overboard or I'll plug you arter. Lucky the sun's warm, or the little critter'd froze."

A few more slashes with his sharp knife-blade, and the woman's limbs were free. He then removed the gag from her mouth. But not a movement or a sound followed. She lay as if dead.

"Mein Gott!" cried Hans in terror. "Look at her pootiful hair! It's all red mit plood!"

It was as he said. A crimson patch stained the silky texture of her soft brown hair. With a shudder Jack put his fingers on the spot. He shook his head doubtfully.

"They've guv her a settler," he remarked. "That's been done to quiet her."

Yet it was evident that the woman was not dead. A slight flutter of breath could be discovered about the lips. There was a faint action of the heart.

"We've got to git back to the city in double quick," declared Jack, resolutely. "She's alive yit, but I wouldn't like to insure her fur no big divy. And we've got to take everything jist as we found it, too, to show ther perlice."

"I reckon," answered Hans.

Jack began operations by removing the two stones to his own boat. Then he moved the insensible woman and looked for the rent in the boat's bottom. There was a hole that he could put his hand through. This he plugged tightly up, and then he bailed the water out of the scuttled craft. Next the child was replaced on the mother's breast, the boats attached together by a strong rope, and the two boys sat to their oars for a long and weary pull.

"Hope the tide's runnin' up this time," said Jack. "We'd never make it ag'in tide."

CHAPTER II.

ONLY THE LETTER L.

It was nearly night when the two rowers, with their strange tow, drew in to one of the down-town wharves.

The tide had helped them somewhat, but they were well tired out with their long and hard pull.

Some idlers who were on the wharf looked down in listless curiosity.

"Bear a hand, somebody," cried Jack. "Guv us a hitch, won't ye? Wide awake now, here comes the painter!"

He flung the rope to the wharf log, and clambered up quickly after it, as one of the men twisted it around a post.

"Pull her up, Dutchy, and keep yer weather eye open," he called, to his companion. "I'm goin' to plug out fur a cop."

He was off like a shot. Hans did as ordered. He pulled up the tow, with its valuable freight, alongside of the one he was in.

He did more than that. He leaned over the woman's form and fumbled for a minute about her throat, while his little eyes glittered with avarice. He seemed to be after some trinket which had attracted his fancy.

"What in the blazes have you got there?" cried the man, who had caught the boat. "That's a queer tow. Why, it's a woman and a baby, or I'm a sinner!"

Hans gave a guilty start, as if he had been caught in some dirty trick. He quickly concealed something in his pocket. His half-moon face was full of stupid innocence as he looked up.

"We's been fishin', Firefly Jack unt me. We cotched dem dings 'mong der splatters."

"The deuce you did! Then I'll be hanged if you haven't made a big catch."

At this moment Jack returned, with a policeman whom he had found. A few minutes sufficed to tell the story of their discovery. Considerable of a crowd had by this time collected, attracted by the evidence of something going on.

Their curiosity became excitement when they heard Jack's story. It was evident that the boys had stumbled on the track of an attempted murder, and that a dastardly and extraordinary one.

The excitement of the crowd was doubled when the child, which had been quiet, now broke into its distressing cry.

"Pass the little 'un up here," cried Jack, to his companion. "Pretty little possum, it's lucky it ain't got its pipes drowned out with cold water. I kinder like to hear it yell."

He took the child from Hans's arms, and fondled it as if he fully understood the art. The people around pushed up with lively interest.

"A dear little thing it is."

"Pretty as a picture."

"To think that any man could have the heart to try and kill that little innocent!"

"I'd like to see the villain hung."

"Or roasted alive."

"Or blown up with dynamite."

"Is it a boy or a girl?" asked one old fellow, peering in.

"Can't ye see it's a gal? Any blind mule mought see that," answered Jack, sharply, a little tired of this admiration.

By this time the policeman had got some help. He jumped into the boat, and managed to have the senseless form of the woman lifted to the wharf.

"Good Lord!" cried one of the bystanders, starting back with horror. "Her hair is dabbled with blood! She has got a death-blow above the temple!"

"Look at her! Young and pretty! And dressed in silk and lace! She's no poor creature, that's sure!"

"It's a case of crime in high life. If this business isn't probed to the bottom there's no law in the country."

"Make way there," cried the officer sharply. "There's a little too much jaw in the country, and not enough sense, just now. Take a good hold on her shoulders, boys. We must carry her to Blaylock's, across the wharf. She's dripping wet, and the air is growing chilly."

In ten minutes afterward the rescued lady was laid on a table, in a room in which a fire had been hastily made, in a hotel near the wharf.

A neighboring magistrate and a doctor had been sent for. The crowd had tried to push into the room, but the sturdy policeman stationed himself at the door, club in hand, and threatened to brain any man who did not keep his distance.

Only Hans and Jack were admitted, with two or three others who had helped in the removal, and were able to testify as to the state of the boat.

Jack still held the child. He had succeeded in quieting it. The rough boy now showed his tenderness and the art of a woman, and the desolate little thing nestled up to him as closely as if it had been her mother, while a faint smile lit up the tear-stained face.

"That's a little cherub, pootsy tootsy,"

fondled Jack, stroking the child's flaxen hair. "She's just a little diamond, she is. And what's the darlin's name?"

"Minny," answered the child confidingly. "Where's mamma?"

"Oh, mamma's asleep." "Me wants mamma. Minny's eber so cold!" The little innocent shivered, in her wet clothes.

"We'll soon settle that," answered Jack, taking her to the stove, which was now beginning to throw out a grateful warmth.

A laugh of delight came to the little face, as she felt the warm rays from the heated stove. She threw her arms round Jack's neck, and pressed her rosy cheek to his.

"Me likes you!" she confided.

"And me likes you," answered the pleased boy, kissing her sweet lips.

Baby-like, she had for the moment forgotten her mother. She dreamed not of the sad lot in life that lay threatening before her.

In a few minutes more the doctor who had been summoned entered. He was quickly followed by the magistrate. A few words sufficed to give them a brief idea of the case.

"This is a very important matter," said the magistrate gravely. "I never heard of a more dastardly attempt at murder. To drown a woman and her child together! And sink them so they could never rise! It's no 'prentice work."

As he spoke the doctor approached the woman, and was making an examination of her condition.

"Pulse feeble, but it holds," he remarked. "She has been a young and strong woman. Good development. Sound lungs. Healthy heart action. Ugly contusion that on the head. But it may be only a flesh wound. The poor creature has been making a noise, and the murderer has struck her to quiet her. Gentlemen, these wet clothes must be removed at once. The chill is dangerous in her low state. Are there no women in the house, and no dry clothes that will fit her?"

"Yes," answered the landlord, who was present.

"Then send them here at once. And clear the room while her clothes are changed. I speak as a physician. Does the law make any objection?" he asked the magistrate.

"No," answered the latter, who had been examining the cut ends of ropes round her wrists and ankles, while the doctor was investigating her wound.

In a few minutes more a couple of women appeared, with some warm, dry clothes.

"See if there is any wound or contusion about the body," ordered the doctor, as he left the room.

"And if there is any guide to her identity, name on clothing, letters, trinkets, anything," added the magistrate.

The room was cleared, and the women left in charge. Firefly Jack still held his prize. The child's dress had not been soaked, like the mother's. It had only been dampened by contact with her clothing, and was nearly dry now from the stove heat.

At this moment a detective, who had been hurriedly sent for, entered. But he kept in the background, and listened quietly to the story of the boys, as the magistrate now questioned them closely about their adventure.

Jack was clearly the lion of the hour. He still held the child, despite the desire of some of the persons present to take it from him. The little thing, in fact, seemed to view Jack as her one friend in the assembly. She flung her chubby arms around his neck, and looked with frightened defiance at the others.

In his racy way the lad gave the story in full detail, and dwelt on Hans's fear of a ghost, until the latter broke out in loud denial.

"Don't like der spooks, neder," he ejaculated. "Unt I never said dat der minchen were a spook. Yoost you tell der truth, Firefly Jack."

Jack winked to the others, and continued his story. It became dramatic when he related how they had burst through the barrier of water-plants, and found the stranded boat with its startling freight. The insensible woman, tied hand and foot to the ribs of the boat, the child bound upon her breast, a gag thrust between her lips, her hair dabbled with blood, the boat scuttled and half-full of water, stones of fifty-pound weight each put in to sink it, only the barest chance to save two human lives. A shudder of excitement ran through the nerves of the listeners, as the boy made the most of his thrilling tale.

"By the high heaven, but it is a dastardly business!" exclaimed a portly gentleman, who had recently entered, and had listened to Jack's

story with growing excitement. "The murderers should be strung up as high as Haman! The city should offer a large reward for their discovery. I'll add to it myself. I never heard of anything more cold-blooded!"

"How much?" asked a man who stepped forward at these words. He was a very keen-eyed and sharp-faced individual. "Name your figure. Words without figures are worth nothing."

"Who are you?" demanded the gentleman.

"I am a detective," was the quiet answer.

"Ha! Then, sir, you shall see that I mean what I say. I am not the man to deal in idle bluster. I offer a reward of a thousand dollars for the capture of the man or men who did this dreadful deed."

"Your name and address?" asked the detective coolly, as he took out his note-book. "That is my line of business, and I'll do my best to earn the money."

"Howard Bronson, 681 Spruce street. I am well known."

"Your name is warrant, Mr. Bronson. I would rather have it than some men's bonds," and the officer returned a polite bow.

"Jist look here a bit," cried Jack eagerly. "This ain't nailed fur the perlice, is it? S'pose somebody else goes fur that pile? Say a boy like me?"

"I hardly fancy you would succeed," answered the gentleman, with a smile.

"I kin try, anyhow. A cool thousand is a big thing. I found the woman and the baby. Maybe I mought straddle the man as done it."

"All right, young man. The offer is a general one. You are a brave and a shrewd fellow, and I hope you may win."

"Me too!" cried Hans, starting up. "I helped find der leddy and der minchen. I'll go snooks mit Firefly Jack."

"Do half the work and you'll git half the pay," answered Jack coolly. "Thar's the pile. It's a free blow fur any chap as likes to go in fur it."

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the entrance of the women, who had been engaged in changing the wounded lady's attire.

They reported that there was no other wound than that on the head. They had examined the clothing carefully, but had found no name, and nothing to give a hint as to who the woman was. Her underclothing was marked with the letter L, and this was the only guide to her identity. The pocket had been found empty of everything but a handkerchief, which bore the same initial letter.

The officials re-entered the room, Mr. Bronson accompanying them. The detective, who had been excited by the reward offered, made a close examination of the still insensible woman and of the removed clothing, in hopes that his experienced eyes would find some clew.

But there was another person in the room who had that reward in his eye. Firefly Jack had meant all he said when he entered for the prize. He now took slyly from his pocket a rolled-up handkerchief. This he carefully opened, watching the detective as he did so. Inside it appeared a bunched fragment of newspaper. This the boy quietly slipped into his pocket. Then he rolled up the handkerchief again as it had been before.

"Here's somethin' else," he said to the detective, who had just finished examining the clothing. "Here's the handkercher as was put in her mouth fur a gag. I stuck it in my pocket when I cut her loose."

The officer took it and examined it. There was nothing about it that would serve for a clew. Nobody had noticed Jack's sly manipulation.

"This woman must be taken to the hospital," said the doctor, decidedly. "I don't like this continued insensibility. That contusion on the head may have affected the brain."

"And what is to be done with the child?" asked the landlord.

"I'll take care o' her," answered Jack, decidedly. "I live near here, and I know my mother'll be glad to take her in."

The detective turned.

"Let me have that child," he said. He made a rapid search for the child's clothing, but it was done under a disadvantage, for the frightened baby kicked and screamed at being thus roughly dealt with by strange hands.

Nothing was found. The little one was simply dressed, though its clothes were of rich material. It struggled like a little vixen.

"Me wants to go! Le' me go! You hurts Minny," she screamed, in childish passion.

"Here, take the youngster!" said the officer.

sourly, returning her to Jack. "It's worse than handling a pig under a gate."

Minny nestled in Jack's arms with utter confidence, while a smile broke through her tears.

"Much you know 'bout babies," retorted the boy. "Look at her now, dear little toad! I'd sooner be a pig under a gate than be a baby with you a-hold of it."

He turned and marched away in high indignation.

CHAPTER III.

THE SCRAP OF PAPER.

The papers of the next morning came out with flaring details of the attempted murder. It was a genuine local sensation, and the whole city was interested and indignant.

A demand was made for any information that could lead to the identity of the woman. All who knew of missing women were asked to call at the hospital, and see if they could identify her.

It was astonishing how many people knew of strange occurrences, and how many women were missing. A score of communications were sent to the police authorities, all of them utterly useless. A dozen persons called at the hospital who knew of lost women. But none recognized the beautiful, lifeless face of the patient.

Who she was; where she came from; what were her connections; all these remained deep mysteries.

Meanwhile the detective who had taken the case in hand was not idle. He succeeded, after some trouble, in finding an owner for the scuttled boat.

It was the property of a worthy shipwright of Kensington, and had been stolen, on the night before its discovery, from its wharf, the lock that fastened it being broken. The owner was decidedly astonished when he heard of the strange cargo that had been shipped in his craft.

It was evident that some other boat had been used—a yacht probably—and that more than one person had been concerned in the crime.

But we will not follow the detective in his further work, his search for a yacht that had been used, his inquiries at hotels, and the various other usual steps of investigation. It will be sufficient to say that they proved utter failures, and that the affair promised to remain one of the mysteries of the day. It did not look as if he was going to make his thousand very easy.

But we must return to Jack Jarvis, or Firefly Jack as he was called by his associates. It will be remembered that he also had put in for the reward. And he meant it. A thousand dollars was as big as a meeting-house in Jack's eyes.

The house in which he resided was not a very big one, and not overcrowded with furniture. But it was well filled up with boys and girls, of whom there were a full half-dozen younger than our hero. It was easy to see where he had learned the art of handling babies.

Mrs. Jarvis was a full-formed, motherly woman, with a broad, good-natured face. She had taken with the utmost kindness to Jack's waif, after she had heard the story of the find.

"Poor little dear," she cried tenderly, softly coddling the child. "And they tried to murder you! Sweet little blue-eyed orphan. Was it your father, dear, that done it? Your cruel, cruel father?"

"Tell you what it is, mother," cried Jack, from where he was nestled in a corner, "we maybe ain't seen the last o' this yit. The chap as tried to make ghosts o' Minny an' her mother mought try it on ag'in. We've got to keep an eye open fur lame ducks."

"He will never get her from me," exclaimed Mrs. Jarvis. "I've got enough, the blessed knows, but I'll be as keerful of the poor thing as if it was my own."

"And the young 'uns here best act as spies and scouts," added Jack. "If anybody comes pryin' round I want to know who 'tis. D'ye hear that, Tom and Joe? If you twig any sich coon jist you foller him, and find out what he looks like and where he goes. There's money in this biz."

The boys crowded up, delighted to be engaged in such a duty. The baby had taken the hearts of the whole family, and they were ready to stand on their heads for it.

Jack escaped from the bustling crew. He had other fish to fry, and wanted a place where there was less noise.

Making his way to his bedroom, he seated himself by the open window, in the rays of the morning sunlight, that streamed warmly in.

Here he drew from his pocket the crumpled piece of newspaper which he had taken from the gag. It had apparently been rolled inside the handkerchief to make it do its duty better.

The young scout opened it out carefully, smoothing its wrinkles. It was a badly torn scrap, that seemed to have been hastily twisted from a folded up newspaper.

Jack's heart was full of doubt. It might be one of the city papers, in which case it would be perfectly useless as a clew. The idea was running in his head that these people were not Philadelphia folks, and he eagerly hoped that the paper might aid in tracing them.

A single glance gladdened his heart. He had been a newsboy, and knew the look of all the city papers. This resembled none of them. It had, in fact, more of the look of a country paper.

The piece he had rescued was covered on one side with literary matter, and on the other with advertisements.

These he looked at first. One look told him that it was an Ohio paper, and of a country district, for the advertisements gave the names of several small towns, none of which he had ever heard of.

"Hunk!" cried the boy to himself, slapping his knee. "Tain't none o' yer high-flyers, that go everywheres and git into everybody's fingers. Papers like this don't go outside their county, and must have been picked up there. I ain't sold papers for six years not to know that much."

But there was a surer guide yet. Part of the title of the paper had been preserved. It had been torn there in a jagged manner, but several of the capital letters of the heading could be made out. These were the three letters N G T, and after a break the two capitals G L.

Jack looked at it quizzically.

"Mought stand fur Niggertown Gal. Don't s'pose it does though. But you kin bet a bag o' peanuts I'm goin' to find out. They know me like a breeze at the *Star* office. Guess I'll hike up there."

Replacing his prize in his pocket, he snatched his hat and left the house.

A half-hour later found him at the office of the *Evening Star*. The clerks had leisure at that hour, and one of them hailed him with recognition.

"Ha! Firefly Jack! Going to take on the *Star* again? You're too early."

"Not much," was the short answer. "I've dropped that line o' biz."

"Since little Chunky licked you, eh? He swears he drove you off the beat."

"Ha!" cried Jack, bristling up. "He says that? Chunky says that? Oh, come now. You're sellin' me."

"Not a bit. He says he rattled you till you yelled. It's queer that a fellow of your size would let a bunch of beet-roots like him serve you out."

"Him serve me out!" exclaimed Jack, hotly. "Where is the galoot? If I don't make squash out of his pumpkin-head ye needn't call me Firefly no more. Trot him out lively. I'll learn the coon to blow behind my back."

The mischievous clerk winked slyly to his fellows.

"Oh, come, Jack," he said, "it's easy to talk. But I calculate you won't wait till Chunky comes round."

"I won't, hey?" The boy's eyes were full of fight. "When will he be here?"

"In an hour."

"Then I'm anchored."

He seated himself with an angry surge, and with his teeth set like a rat-trap. His blood was up to fever heat.

A sly smile went the round of the clerks as the twitting fellow returned to his desk. He had succeeded in sowing his share of mischief.

For five minutes Jack sat there, with but one thought in his brain. He was an Arab again, to the finger-tips. Then a recollection of his errand suddenly came to him, and he sprung hastily up.

He took out his paper fragment and spread it on the counter.

"See here," he cried. "Tain't Chunky now. I kin settle his hash any time. You just driv my biz out o' my brain-pan. Got bigger fish on the fire, I have. I'd like ye to tell me where that paper come from, and what's its name."

The clerk stepped up and cast his eye on the fragment. He turned it over and examined it on both sides.

"It's an Ohio country paper. Where did you get it?"

"S'pose I don't know 'hat? I want to know its name. Reckon you've got a newspaper list."

The clerk took down a list and referred to it, after reading the fragment of the title.

"Here it is," he said. "The Bungtown Eagle."

Published at Bungtown, Ohio. Circulation about 1,500. Anything else?"

"Tain't got no spread out, then?"

"No. It's only a county sheet. What's up, boy? What's in that— Ah! by Jove! I forgot. You must be the fellow that was concerned in that river-find yesterday—the woman and the baby."

"Reckon I was," answered Jack, dryly.

"Had a hand in it."

"By Jove! you're our meat. Come back here at once. Sit down and tell us all about it."

He hustled the boy behind the counter, while the others gathered curiously around.

"You had it all in the morning papers," said Jack, diffidently.

"Haven't had your statement. Come, you've got to go down to glory in the *Star*. You're one of our old staff, you know. Now just tell the whole story."

Thus desired, the boy made no hesitation in telling the story of his yesterday's adventure, though it was getting to be something of an old song to them.

As he spoke, his words were taken down by a quick reporter. The *Star* had gained a point, in an interview of the chief actor in the crime that was just then the main topic of public talk.

A column of padding was quickly slipped out to make room for the account of the interview with Firefly Jack.

He had just finished when the fun-loving clerk, who was looking toward the door, exclaimed:

"Here comes Chunky now."

"You weren't gibin' me on him?"

"No."

"Jist ax him if he kin lick me. I'd like ter hear him orate."

The door opened and a boy entered. He was well named. He was short and thick of frame, bull-necked and thick-headed. His arms were short and stout, and his hands looked as if they would double up into the size of cocoanuts.

He was every way larger and stouter than Jack. He looked considerably stronger, but twice as clumsy.

"Hello, Chunky," cried the clerk. "Do you know who's been inquiring after you?"

"Nobody, I guess."

"Firefly Jack. I told him what you said about licking him. He swears it's a lie, and that he can slice you into frying meat in five seconds."

"Like to see him do it," cried Chunky, angrily. "I licked him and I can lick him again. He wouldn't talked so big only I wasn't here."

"He says you're a blowin' galoot."

"He's nothing but a skipping rabbit. He daren't face me. I'd make him dance like a chestnut on a hot plate."

"You would, hey? Well, here's your chance."

Jack was on his feet and facing his bragging antagonist, his eyes blazing with anger.

Chunky retreated a step, with a show of pallor on his fat cheeks. But his spirit was up, too, and he quickly returned to the scratch.

"Hiding, were you? Well, I can lick you. I said it, and I'll stick to it. There."

"I'm yer hoss," cried Jack, bustling round into the open space before the counter. "Square-versef. We'll settle this little biz on the spot. Then nobody won't have to charge it."

The men looked on, egging the combatants with approving words. They were all the young fry of the office. None of the older heads were present.

The boys hustled up, like two game-cocks, with clinched fists and arms on guard.

Chunky knew Jack's reputation, but thought he could save his face. After the first blow he intended to rush in, and beat down his slighter antagonist by main strength.

"Ready?"

"Yes."

Something like a stroke of lightning passed before the stout boy's eyes. What happened nobody could well tell, but in an instant Chunky was stretched on his back on the floor, with a thousand stars dancing before his eyes.

Jack stood quiet and firm as an oak sapling.

"That's only salt, Chunky. Take any pepper?" he asked.

The felled boy drew himself up into a sitting position.

"How did you do it?" he asked, in a tone of helpless wonder that set all the clerks into a laugh.

"Didn't ye see somethin' flash afore yer eyes?"

"Yes."

"That was the firefly. Don't ye know my fist sparks out jist like a lightnin'-bug? That's

what makes them call me Firefly Jack. Want to try another round?"

"Not to-day, thankee."

"Good-by, then. When you git up to fightin' weight ag'in, jist drop a line to Bungtown, Ohio. I'm off fur there straight."

Jack was away like a flash. Chunky slowly drew himself to his feet with a dazed expression. He knew that something had happened, but he was not right sure what.

CHAPTER IV.

JACK'S FREE PASS.

"Going to Ohio?" Mrs. Jarvis held up her hands in utter surprise.

"That's 'bout the size of it, mom," answered Jack coolly.

"What for, I'd like to know?"

"Goin' fur that thousand reward," returned the boy. "Mr. Bronson offered that, and folks say he means what he says. What's more, I'd like to beat that detective. He's a good deal too fresh."

"But what do you expect to find in Ohio?"

Jack answered by an explanation of the newspaper discovery.

"These folks come from somewhere near Bungtown," he said. "They've tuk photygrafs of the lady, and I've got one. Goin' to dig round there till I nail somebody as knows her. Got to find out who these folks are 'fore we kin nail the murderer."

Mrs. Jarvis looked at her confident son with admiration. Jack was decidedly showing his oats. But a shadow came over her face.

"That's all very well, boy; but you can't fly or swim to Ohio."

"Don't want to, as long as there's railroads."

"And where's the money to take you there? The goodness knows I haven't got it. Why, it'll take a mint of money, and I couldn't spare you a dollar to bless you with."

"Never you mind that, mom. I've got a free pass. And grub throwed in. I ain't no slouch, marny time."

"A free pass? Where is it?"

"Here," returned Jack, snatching up little Minny, who was playing on the floor with his little sister, as happy as if her mother was not lying at the hospital in a dying state.

"That! You don't mean—"

"That I'm goin' to take this blessed baby with me! You bet I am. And jist you see if Minny don't pass me through. Don't want no money. Got plenty."

He dug his hand into his pocket, and drew it up with a lot of small change, which he quickly counted.

"Got sixty cents. Guess that ought to take me to Ohio. Put me up a lunch, mom. Mought want something to nibble at till I git my work in."

Mrs. Jarvis stood aghast at the reckless assurance of her son. But there was some admiration mingled with it. She believed in Jack. He had shown what was in him more than once before. After another weak protest which he greeted with a merry laugh, she set herself merrily to preparing a lunch.

"When are you going, Jack?" she timidly inquired.

"First Pittsburgh lightnin' Express. Ain't goin' to take no barn-door 'commodations, where they kin stop anywhere and put stray folks off. If they want to git rid o' me they've got to take time to do it."

At six o'clock that evening he was at the Pennsylvania Railroad station, ready for the night Express to Pittsburgh and the West.

He had a cleaner face than usual, and was dressed in his best clothes. They were whole and clean, if not very fine. In his arms he carried the child. Minny's clothing had been cleaned and pressed by Mrs. Jarvis until she looked as neat as a new pin. Her blue eye wandered in wonder over the throng of people, and then turned with confidence to Jack, to whom she seemed to have taken a wonderful fancy.

"Where we going?" she lisped.

"Travelin'," answered Jack. "Goin' on the cars, and behind the big locomotive. We're boss coons, you and me is, Minny!"

"Me ain't no boss coon: me's Minny, and you's Jack. You said you's Jack."

"That's so. My, but you're a cunnin' one!"

"Won't let nobody hurt Minny?"

"I'll chaw up the chap as tries it. Like ter see anybody look at you crossways. I'd jist bu'st his snoot!"

"Me likes you, Jack," and the child nestled up to him in utter trust.

The boy looked at her proudly. He felt like a young knight errant with a dreadful task before

him, and vowed to carry it through or die in the harness. He invested some of his stray pennies in an evening newspaper, and then joined the crowd which was surging toward the train.

Through the narrow gate they passed, each showing his ticket. Jack had none to show, but that did not trouble his valiant heart. He was going through somehow. He would have been utterly ashamed to let himself be stopped at the first step of his enterprise.

"Show your tickets!" cried the gatekeeper. "Harrisburg. Pittsburgh. That's right. Here, young man, your ticket."

"Ain't got none," answered Jack.

"Then what are you doing here? Step out, and don't stop the passengers."

"Guess I'll step in," said Jack.

"You can't pass without a ticket, I tell you!" was the impatient answer. "Clear out, now! Don't you see you're stopping everybody?"

"All right," returned Jack. "But jist wait till the woman as owns this baby, and as guv it to me to hold, gits in your wool! S'pose I'm goin' to let her slide off in that train without her baby? Don't calkerlate I'm goin' to turn inter a orphan asylum, do ye? Not much, I reckon!"

"The child belongs to some woman on the train? Why didn't you say so before? Slide on!"

Jack slid on without answer. He would have liked to give the agent a little of his slack, but judged that a still tongue made a wise head. He was on the right side of the gate, and didn't want to get kicked back to the wrong side.

The bold adventurer was not long in boarding the train, and in securing himself a comfortable seat in the best car he could find. He deposited the delighted child on the seat beside him. Within two minutes the train began to move. All was safe so far. The long journey was begun.

Away they sped, with a rapidly increasing speed. The train contained three or four cars, which were tolerably well filled with ladies and gentlemen.

The child was delighted with the swift motion. She clapped her hands, and laughed merrily.

"Lift me up, so's me can look out," she commanded. "Me been in cars before. With mamma and papa."

"Ha!" cried Jack, eagerly. "So Minny's got a papa. What sort of a papa?"

"Me don't like him. Me only like mamma. Papa cross."

"Oh!" was all Jack's answer.

He lifted the child to the window, and fell into a deep train of thought.

"She's been travelin', too. Must ha' been lately. Guess things look fresh. But my, won't ther be fun when the conductor comes round fur my ticket? I bet a fig he gits right on his ear. Don't keer if he chucks b'ilie persimmons at me. I'm booked through."

He drew the newspaper from his pocket, and settled himself down to a quiet read, as easy at heart as if he had a through ticket and a pocket full of gold.

Jack turned at once to the column in which he took most interest just then, that of local affairs. He was anxious to see if there were any further news about the lady in the hospital.

He was not long in finding an item that interested him deeply. It ran as follows:

THE RIVER OUTRAGE.

"The lady victim of this dastardly assault still lies at the hospital. But there are signs of her long insensibility coming to an end. Her pulse is stronger, and she has made some movements. The doctors think that she will soon recover her speech. But they fear that the wound in her head may seriously affect her brain. They dread some permanent injury to the mind."

"Mought as well lose her life as lose her wits," muttered the shrewd lad. "Wonder if old Bronson'll let up on the reward if the woman comes to? If he does I'll haunt him. I'm all alive fur fun, but I don't b'ilie in shenanigins."

The train moved on, mile after mile. The city lay far behind, and the broad green fields appeared. The shadows of night were beginning to gather. The child turned from the window, and began her childish prattle to Jack.

Several of the adjoining ladies looked at her with interest. She was so pretty, and had such a sweet voice and silvery laugh, that she seemed to take their hearts at once.

"Is poor mamma still sick?" she demanded.

"She's getting better," answered Jack.

"I wants to see her eber so bad. We goin' to her?"

"Guess so. Sorter roundabout," he rejoined.

"Tickets! Have your tickets ready!"

It was the voice of the conductor, who had just entered the car. Jack sat back and closed his teeth. He felt that the crisis was approaching.

"Tickets! Show your ticket."

This was addressed to Jack.

"Ain't got none," he answered quietly.

"Got none? Then what are you doing here?"

"Takin' a ride."

"Why, you impudent young rascal, do you want to twit me? Your ticket, I say! Or I'll stop the train and put you off."

"Ain't got no ticket," answered Jack. "Never carry none. Always travel on a free pass."

"You do." The conductor looked doubtfully at the self-possessed boy. "Very well, show your pass then."

"Here's my pass." He picked up Minny and tendered her to the conductor. The child drew back, and clung to him in alarm.

By this time the attention of everybody in the car was arrested. The ladies who had become interested in Minny looked on in sympathy.

"What confounded fooling is this?" cried the conductor angrily. "Do you think you can face a ride through on this train by impudence, boy?"

"Don't want to be imperdent," answered Jack modestly. "But guess if you'd been kicked round town like I've been you'd got a slack in yer tongue looser nor mine. Can't allers choke it down. Anyhow, here's my pass."

The incensed conductor turned and laid his hand on the bell-rope to stop the train.

"Hope yer ain't goin' to put off a little critter like this. Won't hurt me, but you'll catch snooks if anything goes wrong with the baby."

"What are you doing with that child?" asked one of the ladies, in a suspicious tone. "She don't look as if she belonged to you."

This question brought a battery of doubtful eyes on Jack. But there was no flinch in his composition.

"Don't mind telling you," he said. "S'pose you've heerd of the lady and baby, as was half-murdered first, and then left in the river to git drownded?"

"Yes."

"Well, this is the baby. And I'm Firefly Jack, the boy as snatched 'em out."

"You?"

"Sure pop."

"And what brings you here?"

"On the track of the murderer. He's from Ohio, and I'm off on the hunt."

These words had made a change in the situation. All eyes were turned on Jack and his charge with interest. The conductor hesitated, and looked confused.

"That's a cock-and-bull story," he said. "You can't go through on any such yarn. If that's true you could have got a pass."

"Hadn't time," said Jack. "Jist you telegraph back to Tom Scott. Tell him Firefly Jack and the river baby's aboard. You'll see if he don't wire back to pass Jack and the baby."

"I must have money or ticket, or you must get off at first stop," answered the conductor positively.

"Oh come, conductor, do as the boy says," broke out several of the passengers. "If Mr. Scott won't pass him we will be good for his fare."

"All right," answered the conductor. "I'll wire from Harrisburg. Tickets! Have your tickets ready!" He resumed his interrupted task.

Jack had triumphed. In fact he and his charge were the heroes of the car. The ladies had become so interested in Minny that the boy had to hand her over, and she quickly went the rounds of admiration through a dozen hands.

As for Jack himself, he had to repeat his often-told story to a highly interested audience. He would have liked to conceal his present project, but it was drawn out of him in spite of himself.

"Well, well, that's a boy of spirit," said one old gentleman, looking with admiration on Jack's self-possessed face. "But it takes money for a job of this kind. If you travel free, you have to eat. How much money have you?"

"Plenty," answered Jack loftily.

"But how much?"

He thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out his small change.

"All that," he said.

The gentleman laughed.

"You are a reckless young rogue. Here, take this." Jack drew back. "For the child, then. Take it in trust for her."

"Thankee," answered the proud boy, as he thrust the bank bill into his pocket.

Jack had no further trouble with his charge. She was completely taken possession of by the ladies. Her childish evidence confirmed the truth of Jack's story.

He was fast asleep when the train rattled into Harrisburg.

"I have sent the telegram, said the conductor. "Will hardly get answer before Pittsburgh."

"We stand security," answered the passengers.

Day was breaking when they entered Pittsburgh. The train came to a halt. The conductor jumped off and hurried to the telegraph office. He quickly returned with a long slip of paper.

"All right," he cried to Jack. "Here's your pass."

The slip read:

"Pass Firefly Jack and river baby, and God speed them. T. Scott."

CHAPTER V. THE BUNGTON EAGLE.

BUNGTON, Ohio, was no brag of a town. It had probably a thousand inhabitants, but the town was dropped down loosely, like a string of beads that has become untied, and has scattered around promiscuously. The town was half-country, or the country was half-town, it was not sure which. Open fields elbowed the houses, and the corners of farms thrust themselves into the town limits.

But it was full of life this April morning. The hammer of the blacksmith rung merrily on his anvil, carpenters were busy putting up new frame buildings, carriages and carts rattled by, as Firefly Jack walked up its main street, with his youthful charge toddling joyfully along beside him.

The boy's nose was in the air, as he took a survey of the town.

"Tain't no great shakes of a place," he muttered. "I s'pose us city folks git sp'iled and 'spect too much out o' countrymen. But I'll just say this. When I get some spare cash, and want to buy a town, it won't be Bungtown."

His soliloquy was checked by perceiving the words, "Bungtown Eagle," displayed in great letters on a sign across the street.

"That's cosey," said Jack. "Ain't losin' no time."

He plunged across and into the office of the *Eagle*, without a moment's hesitation. There was no troublesome backwardness in Jack's disposition.

The editor was seated there, a tall, lank-jawed, sandy-haired specimen, yet with a fair show of wit and sense in his countenance. He looked up inquiringly at his visitor.

Jack seated himself coolly, lifted Minny to his knee, and took off his cap.

"Dropped round to see you," he began. "All the way from Philadelfy. S'pose you hain't never seen this little gal afore?"

"Never," said the editor, surprised at this odd address.

"Ever see this paper?"

Jack took the significant fragment from his pocket, and spread it out before the eyes of the editor. The latter glanced at it.

"Yes. That's a piece of the *Eagle*. One of the *Eagle*'s feathers, I may call it, dropped two weeks ago. I don't understand you, boy. What's up?"

"The very old blazes is up. Jist the biggest thing on ice. Keep yer level, and I'll tell ye all 'bout it."

He proceeded to do so, much to the interest and amazement of the editor. His interest was extreme when he found that the fragment of the Bungtown *Eagle* before him was mysteriously connected with the attempted murder.

"Good Heavens!" he cried, "this is an extraordinary affair! A most extraordinary affair. Why, I've got the full story in the copy just in press. And you're the boy that saved them? Extraordinary! And that child! That pretty child! Why, I never heard of anything so extraordinary!"

"I'm out here on the hunt," continued Jack. "S'pose your *Eagle* don't fly very fur. Tain't a paper as anybody'd like to have 'cept he come from these diggin's. Want ter see if little Minny won't be reckernized 'bout here."

"Poor little creature!" cried the warm-hearted editor, taking up the willing child. "Pretty, rosy sweet! You've come to the right place, my boy. If the parties belong to this county I'll soon find out. Wait. I'll stop the press, and put an inquiry into this number of the paper."

He rushed to the door and gave an order in an excited tone. Then he ran back to his table, dashed off a paragraph in great haste, and again hurried to the door of the composing-room.

"Set that up, instantly," he commanded. "Display it well. Crowd out that editorial on wheat. Hurry! Must be to press inside a half-hour."

He shut the door again, and turned to Jack.

"Straight through from Philadelphia?" he demanded. "Extraordinary! To send out such a young person as a detective! But you must want a wash-up and some breakfast. And this poor dear! Come with me. You must put up with me while you stay here."

Jack followed the impulsive and hospitable editor without hesitation. He was not very grateful, for he knew that the invitation was to Minny more than to him. She had taken the editor's warm heart. But that did not trouble Jack. He had counted on her as his free pass, and not without sound judgment.

The editor's house was not far away from the newspaper office, and the editor's wife proved as fond of pretty babies as the editor himself. Jack found himself and his charge warmly welcomed to a comfortable house and a warm breakfast, for which he had no end of appetite. The story of the attempted murder had untied the very heart-strings of these good people.

In fact, for the week that Jack stayed with him he was treated like a lord, and they would have taken Minny clear from him, had he been willing to let her go.

But the hopes of the adventurous boy seemed destined to be disappointed. The inquiry in the paper, and the questions which the editor asked of everybody, brought no favorable reply. Everybody was interested, but nobody knew anything. Minny held a levee every day in the editor's parlor, but no one, in town or county, had ever seen her face before. And none of the inhabitants had set out on a journey during the past month. Strange as was the circumstance of the discovered fragment of the *Bungtown Eagle*, it was certain that the parties had not come from that region. The murderer must have got the paper in some other manner.

Jack was dreadfully disappointed. He had felt sure he was on the right track, and had almost heard the jingle of the thousand dollars in his pocket, and it cut him to be thus baffled.

But there was nothing for it but to make his way back home.

"Dreadful sorry," said the editor. "I've done all I can. I would give something fine if you would only leave Minny with us. I'm in love with her."

"Can't spare her," said Jack. "What's more, her mother might be axin' some awkward questions."

"Minny wants to go with Jack," lisped the child. "Me likes you, but me lubes Jack bestest." And she clung to the boy's neck in her affectionate way.

They were on their way to the railroad station. Bungtown was a stopping place for meals for many of the express trains. There was a restaurant connected with the depot building, and "ten minutes for refreshments" was a daily call as the through trains dashed wildly up, and came to a wheezing halt.

They found a train at the station when they came up. It was a west-bound express, and the travelers were busy making the most of their ten minutes' grace. The attendants behind the refreshment bar were as busy as bees.

Jack seated himself, taking Minny in his arms, and talked with the editor while the passengers snatched hot buns and sandwiches, and poured scalding coffee in hasty gulps down their throats.

The warning whistle sounded. There was a rush for the train. In a minute more it was off again. The rush and bustle ended like magic, and all settled down suddenly into a Sunday-like quiet.

The lady proprietor of the restaurant came from behind the bar; a stoutish, middle-aged person. She nodded to the editor.

"I declare, if they ain't like so many hungry hyenas," she remarked. "I have been trying to get to your house to see that child, whom everybody is talking about. But time is too precious."

"You needn't go so far," answered the editor. "You can see her by a turn of the head. This is the child."

The good lady looked at the infant in Jack's arms. Her glance was curious and careless. But her face suddenly changed, and a hasty exclamation came from her lips.

"Goodness gracious me!" she cried.

"What is the matter?" demanded the editor, with a start of hope. "You haven't seen that child before?"

"I may be mistaken. No, I can't be mistaken. It is the same child."

Jack sprung up as if there had been a steel spring in the chair. He held Minny up to the lady's observing eyes.

"Where?" he cried eagerly. "Do you know her? In good, solid earnest?"

"I saw her at the counter here, not more than two weeks ago," said the lady. "She was in her father's arms. They had got off for lunch from a train going east. I remember very well. He bought some lunch for his wife, who had not left the car. He wrapped it in a newspaper that was laying on the counter."

"Ha! Then that accounts for the copy of the *Bungtown Eagle*," cried the editor. "So the parties did not belong here, and were only traveling through? That's an end of your search here, my boy."

"Yes," said Jack sadly. "Much obliged ma'am. Don't see how you kin remember all that, when folks is goin' through in droves every day."

"I wouldn't have remembered," answered the lady, "only that I happened to recognize the gentleman. He was an old acquaintance of mine. I noticed the child particularly, for I did not know he was married. I am sure that it is the child."

"Well, well, this is highly interesting," remarked the editor. "It is really an extraordinary coincidence. Extraordinary. Where did you know him? Who was he? Tell us all about it."

"I can't tell you much good of him. His name is Reece Logan. I knew him in California, ten years ago. He was then a gambler, and a man of very bad report. That was at Sacramento. I haven't seen him since, but I knew him in a minute. I heard afterwards that he had gone to a mining-town, and made money. That was the last I knew of him till I saw him here."

"Did he know you?"

"No. And I did not want to renew my acquaintance. I never knew him, except by sight and name."

"What sort of a lookin' chap is he?" asked Jack.

"Tall. About six foot high. Well built. Handsome face. Wears mustache and side-whiskers. Brownish colored. Fair complexion. Thin lips and piercing eyes. Cruel looking eyes I think them. I always fancied I could see the devil lurking behind them."

Here was an interesting affair. At the editor's request Mrs. Moseley led the way to a private room, where a long conversation was entered into, she giving every point she could possibly remember about the man in question. But this was little more than she had already told. The history of Reece Logan, after he left Sacramento ten years before, must be traced by other means.

They came out again into the waiting-room. It wanted now about fifteen minutes of train time. The telegraph operator, from his office in the corner, called to the editor.

"I have something here for the *Eagle*," he said. "An item just come through from Philadelphia."

The editor received and read it rapidly, while the color came and went in his sandy face.

"Great Jehovah!" he cried, "but this is extraordinary! Never heard of such a coincidence! See here, Firefly Jack, there's something afloat for you. The very old Sam has broken loose in earnest."

"What's up?" demanded Jack quickly. "Anything more 'bout my bizness?"

"Never heard of a more outrageous affair! And in the hospital, too!"

"But what is it?"

"Murder. That's what it is. Minny's mother was murdered in earnest last night! Stabbed to the heart by some unknown person! Nothing known. Made his escape. The whole city excited."

"By the jumpin' Jehosaphat, I don't wonder!" ejaculated the astounded boy. "If I was there I'd be bouncin' clean out o' my boots. Murdered! Good gracious, if ther' ain't fun aboard now, it's queer! That there Reece Logan's my meat. But is that all? Don't they know what he done it for?"

The injured woman had recovered her senses in part. She was beginning to talk. She was wandering, but the doctors thought she would be all right in a few days, and they hoped to learn from her all the circumstances of the assault. The villain seems to have been frightened

ed by this, and to have murdered her to secure himself. The police are on his track."

"Yes, they allers are. That used to be one o' my reg'lar cries, when I sold papers. But they allers tumble off the track. I'm on the track too, and I'm goin' to stick, if ther's any virtue in shoemaker's wax."

In five minutes more Jack and Minny were aboard the train, and swiftly away on their return journey.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RETURN OF THE TRAVELER.

In the hospital bed lay the lifeless form of the murdered woman, her beautiful face now calm in the still whiteness of death.

Detectives were at work seeking to discover how the terrible deed had been done. Death had been instant. The thrust of a knife-blade, long, sharp and slender, had reached the heart, and ended the woman's life as if by a lightning-stroke.

But how? The night attendants had been around the hospital as usual. The door had been locked, and was found locked after the murder. Not a sound had been heard or a form seen. No window had been tampered with.

There were other patients in the same ward, but they had been asleep. No one had been disturbed. The knife by which the murder had been done was left in the wound. It was the only possible guide to the murder, and the detectives took it in charge.

They examined the grounds around the hospital, but in vain. Not a trace of a footprint could be found, though the soil was soft from the recent rain. The detectives scratched their heads in baffled surprise.

Will Clark, the detective who had been present at the first finding of the body, was one of the foremost in this search.

"The man who did this work is an inmate of the hospital," he said, decidedly. "Who are the parties in this ward?" he asked the resident doctor.

"All utterly disabled," was the answer. "That woman in the corner has a badly broken leg. Was only brought in yesterday. This party yonder is a cancer patient. Won't live. Yonder case—the woman with the snub-nose—has a dislocated shoulder. Had a fall, she said. Been fighting, I fancy, from her looks."

He went on describing the various patients, both in the women's and men's wards. They seemed to be all disabled.

"This stout fellow here was flung from a truck a week ago. Got such a shaking up that it will take a month for his bones to settle into their places."

As this description proceeded the sharp eyes of the detective closely examined the faces of the patients, as well as of the nurses and attendants, whose curiosity kept them within hearing.

The investigation ended with nothing learned. Not a scrap of suspicion could be found against anybody. The dead face of the murdered woman appealed for vengeance in vain. The murderer seemed to have made his track through the air, so utterly was it hidden.

Firefly Jack was right, when he sneered at the telegraphic story of the police being on the track. They had never been further off the track.

It was on the second day after the night of this terrible event that the boy and his interesting charge landed in Philadelphia. His free pass had carried him safely through. As for Minny she had given him no trouble, for the ladies on the train had simply taken possession of her. Jack had some trouble to get her back on reaching the city.

His first visit, even before going home, was to the residence of Howard Bronson, 681 Spruce street.

He had laid out his plans during his journey, and now proceeded to put them in execution without delay.

He found the old gentleman at home. He turned his sturdy, honest face inquiringly on Jack, as the boy and child were ushered into his presence.

"Ha, boy! Is it you?" he demanded. "And that poor orphaned infant? Poor, dear, little unfortunate! What do you want? You know, of course, what has happened? The mother has been murdered! Murdered!"

"Oh, yes! Got a private dispatch 'bout that out in Ohio," answered the unblushing boy. "That's what brought me here. I s'pose that thousand hangs out yit?"

"I have made it two thousand," answered Mr. Bronson. "And the hospital authorities have offered as much more. It is a terrible

business. But the police are all astray. I fear the dastardly murderers will escape."

"Not much," answered Jack.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm goin' fur that there four thousand, that's all," returned Jack.

"You? What can you do?"

"Dunno what I kin do. But I know what I have done."

"Ha! What?"

"Got the murderer's name, and a description of his beautiful countenance. Know where he come from, and what sort of a bumble-bee he is."

Mr. Bronson looked doubtfully into the boy's face. But his expression changed as he noted the clear eye, resolute countenance, and straightforward look of his youthful visitor.

"The reward is yours, my lad, if you aid in the capture of this murderer. And what is more, I will make a man of you. Tell me what you mean. I do not understand you."

Jack settled himself and proceeded to describe his late performances. Mr. Bronson listened with interest and surprise.

"Bless me," he declared. "You are a remarkable boy. Reece Logan! From Sacramento! Well, well!"

"This is all, mum, you know," said Jack, impressively. "It's 'twixt you and me. I come to you, 'cause I want you to telegraph out to California, and stir up the perlice out there. Find out all about this Reece Logan. Who he is, where he went, who he married. While ye're doin' that I'll hunt the hotels here, and see if they've got anybody o' that name."

"He may have changed his name."

"Not at first, anyhow. 'Cause he had his wife with him. Mought ha' done it after. Anyhow, I got his description from that Bungtown restaurant woman. May be I kin twig him by that."

After some further conversation, Jack left, having laid out his plans in full with Mr. Bronson.

In less than half an hour more he was at home.

A sensation followed his sudden entrance. The medley of boys and girls on the floor sprung hastily up, whooping with joy to see Jack and the baby.

"Jack! Minny! Come home safe! Guv her to us!"

"Is it you, you little runaway?" said his mother, embracing her boy, warmly. "I knew you would come through all right, but I am glad to see you home again, for all that."

"Me an' Jack, we been riding," lisped Minny. "We been eber and eber so far."

She was already hail-fellow-well-met with the crowd of youngsters, and had paused in a wild romp to give this bit of useful information.

"That's so," said Jack. "Been over some ground. Sit down, mom, and I'll tell you all about it."

Jack told the story he had already related to Mr. Bronson. His mother listened with open-mouthed admiration of her son's wit and prowess. His skill and boldness in making his way out West without a ticket interested her more than the tale of his Bungtown discoveries.

"Anything turned up?" he asked. "See here, boys, I put you on the lookout. Picked up any p'ints?"

"I have had a visitor," said Mrs. Jarvis, mysteriously. "I fancy some one is trying to get possession of Minny."

"Aha!" cried Jack. "Who was it? Tell me all about it."

"It was a woman. A young woman, with a market basket. Rather good-looking, but somehow her face didn't suit me. She said she had heard that Minny was here, and wanted to see her."

"There's nothing in that," said Jack. "I s'pose you've had fifty visitors. Hope you didn't tell 'em where I'd gone."

"No. Except to this woman. She had a reg'lar gimlet tongue, and bored it out of me."

"Wish you hadn't. But I s'pose she was only one o' the cur'us sort."

"I'm afraid it's worse than that," answered Mrs. Jarvis, shaking her head. "The boys happened to be out-of-doors, and they watched her, as you told them. They caught her talking to a desperate-looking man."

"He was a reg'lar plug ugly," broke in Joe. "He was waitin' at the corner of Dock street. Jim and me sneaked close up. They were talkin' kind o' low and mysterious, and they laughed in a nasty way, as I didn't like."

"He was an ugly feller, with his trowsers in his boots," chimed in Jim. "Looked like a Schuylkill Ranger."

"Ah! they are spying on us," remarked Jack. "Anything else? Shouldn't wonder a bit if there was some fun afloat."

"We foller'd 'em, jist as you told us," answered Joe. "They didn't keep together, and Jim took after the woman and me after the man."

"Did you hole 'em anywhere?"

"No. The man axed me what the blazes I was after, and said he'd bu'st my ugly young neck if I didn't git. I was afeard to foller, after that."

"I foller'd the woman to a house in Swanson street," said Jim.

"You did, eh? That's prime! Jist put me on their track, and I bet they don't skeer me off easy. Got anything to eat, mom? Me and Minny's hungry as two crows. Ain't had a speck o' grub since we left Harrisburg."

"Dear me! You must be ravenous. I'll get you something immediately."

The good woman set herself busily to work, while Jack betook himself to his room for a change of clothing.

He had not much time to waste in dressing and eating, however. The murdered woman at the hospital was to be buried that afternoon. The body had been kept with the hope that it might be recognized, and had attracted a crowd of visitors.

In an hour more the coffin was to be finally closed, and the unfortunate stranger consigned to her last resting-place.

Jack could not bear that she should be laid in the grave without his again seeing the sweet young face that had so strongly attracted him.

"And Minny," he said; "she must see her poor mother once more before she is buried. You come with me, mom, and bring Minny. That'll look better than fur me to take her."

Within a short time afterward a small procession left the house on the way to the hospital, comprising M. S. Jarvis and the child, Jack, and little Joe, who had begged so hard to go along that they could not deny him.

At first admittance was refused, but when the gate-keeper learned who Jack was he gave free admission.

The corpse lay ready for burial when they approached. Some kind hands had spread flowers on the young form. And Mr. Bronson had arranged for a respectable funeral, and interment in one of the best cemeteries of the city.

Minny looked with distressed eyes from face to face. She had been told that her mother was dead, but did not seem to understand it. Her wandering eyes fell on the sweet, pale, pulseless face, and a cry of distress broke from her childish lips.

"Mamma! Mamma! Dear mamma!"

Strong men turned away and wiped their eyes, at the deep lamentation of this tone, and at the eager clasp of the young arms round the moveless form, and the pressure of the warm young lips to the cold face.

"Wake up, mamma, dear mamma! Me's here! Minny! Oh, mamma, mamma!"

She had to be taken off and from the room while the undertaker performed the last sad offices for the dead. It had been decided that Mrs. Jarvis and her family, with Minny, should attend the funeral, in the mourners' carriage.

They waited in the adjoining ward of the hospital while preparations were being made, the child, who now seemed to first realize her loss, crying as if her young heart would break.

Little Joe looked around him in wonder, and wandered about the ward, gazing at the sick men in their beds. But he came back rather suddenly, looking scared and white, as if he had been frightened by the spectacle.

"What is the matter?" asked Jack.

The boy made no answer, but stood with his eyes riveted on the tenant of one of the neighboring beds. The man, a harsh-faced fellow, had his eyes fixed on the boy, and seemed to have scared him with the intensity of his gaze.

At this moment they were called. The funeral was ready to start.

"What ailed you there in the hospital?" asked Jack of Joe, as the carriage rolled away after the hearse.

"Didn't you see him? That man that looked at me so?"

"Yes. What of him?"

"Why, that's him. That's the man that the woman talked to, and that I foller'd, and that said he'd break my ugly neck if I didn't slope."

"Aha!" said Jack. "What does that mean? What brings him there? Was he the murderer? Oh! wouldn't I give somethin' nice if this here funeral was over! There's more fun afloat!"

CHAPTER VII.
DUTCHY AND HIS PRIZE.

THAT Firefly Jack burned with anxiety during the slow movements of the funeral need not be told. The information received from little Joe had stirred him up thoroughly. He knew how the detectives had been baffled in their search of the hospital, and that one of them had declared that the murderer must be an inmate of the building. And he felt sure that he had hit on the man. It might be four thousand dollars in his pocket to carry out the idea that was shaping itself in his sharp head.

Two hours passed ere the funeral was over, the body of the murdered woman consigned to its last resting-place, and the carriages returned.

Jack sprung from the carriage when in the neighborhood of the hospital, leaving it to proceed home with his mother and the young folks.

He hurried to the office of a magistrate in the vicinity, who knew him well. Here he told his story. The magistrate shared his suspicions, and at once gave him a warrant for the arrest of the doubtful character. The constable attended Jack on his way back to the hospital.

"A warrant of arrest," cried the gate-keeper, with deep interest. "What name?"

"Don't know the name. We must see first what name he has given."

"Certainly. Here, Harry; take these gentlemen in."

They followed the man thus called into the hospital.

"Something about the murder?" asked the attendant curiously. "Which ward did you say? In there? Well, well, I do hope you are on the right track."

He went in the direction pointed out by the boy, and opened the door of the ward in which Joe had got his scare.

"Here is the man," said Jack. "In this bed to the left."

He marched boldly forward a few steps, and then stopped in surprise and dismay. The bed was empty!

"What's come of the man that was here?" he demanded from some of the neighboring patients.

"Gone. Got up and left an hour ago. Said he was all right, and wasn't going to stay in the hospital any longer, to be drugged to death by the doctors."

The bird had flown!

It was the man who had been entered as flung from a dray, and whom the doctor had said would be good for nothing for a month.

As may be imagined there was some excitement in the hospital when the news of this flight went the rounds.

The missing man had not applied for a discharge, nor had he passed through the gateway to the grounds. A search discovered footprints, and marks on the wall. He had evidently made his escape by climbing.

That he was the murderer everybody was now sure. They all remembered now that he had a ruffianly face. But he had seemed so terribly hurt, groaning at the least touch, that none of the doctors or attendants dreamed that he had the power to move.

"He must be found, by hook or by crook!" cried the constable. "What name and address did he give?"

"Adam Jones, 814 Carpenter street."

"Not much he lives there," cried Jack.

"I'll try there, anyhow."

"All right. Guess I won't go along. Don't keer to wear out my shoe-leather in wild-goose chases."

The boy was bitterly disappointed when he left the hospital. The hasty flight of the man proved that he had been on the right track, and it cut him deeply to be thus sold. He knew that his game was too sharp to be easily trapped.

Jack wandered disconsolately along the street, not knowing just what to do with himself.

"Guess I'll go hunt up Dutchy," he said. "Hain't seen him for a week. I'm jist mad enough to punch somebody's head, and if Dutchy don't look out I'll guv him a sockdolager."

He knew the haunts of his companion too well to have any trouble in finding him. He quickly came across him under a shed in a stable-yard, where Hans spent most of his time.

The stolid young Hollander was seated on an overturned bucket in a corner of the shed, bending over something that seemed to deeply engage his attention. Jack stole up behind him, curious to learn what he was about.

Hans had something in his hand that shone

when the light struck it. The spy crept up and peered over his shoulder.

The Dutch boy was muttering to himself.

"Mein eyes, wouldn't Firefly Jack git mad, if he knew! Dey goodn't find not'ing on der drownded woman. Reckons not mooth. Hans ain't nein blind fool."

"He's a bloody thief, and that's worse," ejaculated Jack.

The discovered sneak thief started with terror, but before he could conceal his treasure it was in Jack's hand.

"Hold yer level, Dutchy," he cried sharply. "Firefly Jack's around, you bet. And he's got his fightin' rig on, too. If you ain't mighty keerful I'll salt yer ugly snoot. Wouldn't like no better fun jist now than to curry down a thief."

"Gib it me," cried Hans, eagerly, making a wild snatch at his treasure. "Der ting's mine. Gib it me."

Jack gave it him, with the back of his hand on his ear. Hans went staggering back against the wall of the shed.

"Now keep mum, or I'll spill the claret from yer bottle nose next swipe. You stole this from the drownded woman while my back was turned, you dirty thief. I've a rascally notion to guv you some firefly practice anyhow."

The irate boy looked so fierce that Hans crouched back in a corner, in trembling dread of Jack's lightning fist.

Giving him another scowl the indignant young champion turned his attention to the treasure he had recovered.

A glance told him that it was gold. It proved to be a richly-embossed locket, which had been worn on a slender cord round the lady's neck. The sheen of the gold in a fold of the dress had caught Hans's covetous eye, and he had managed to get possession of it while the boats lay at the wharf, and while Jack was seeking a policeman.

The boy continued to gaze on it. He knew nothing about such trinkets, yet this looked thick enough to him to have something inside it. After some trouble he succeeded in finding a catch, and on pressing this strongly the locket flew open.

Hans crept up in dread and wonder. In all his admiration of his prize he had not discovered that it contained a secret aperture.

"Vat is it?" he eagerly demanded. "Vat's in der ding? Any goold or di'monds?"

"Oh, yes. A double handful o' di'monds," sneered Jack. "If there was a barrel of 'em, you shouldn't have none, you thief."

What Jack had really discovered was a miniature portrait. It seemed to be an old style daguerreotype, but was so faded out that only the vaguest outlines could be seen. There were dim traces of eyes, nose, mouth and hair, but no scrutiny could have made out the character of the face.

Held in certain lights it looked clearer, and he could see traces of a whisker, sufficient to show that it was a man's face.

"Bet high that's him," cried the disappointed discoverer. "That's her man, fur a pint o' buttermilk. Git yer Dutch eyes here, Hans, and see if you kin make it out. It'll be a fortune in our pocket if we kin find that man."

"Snooks?" cried Hans, eagerly.

"Yes, snooks. Now try yer level best."

Hans screwed his eyes from all sides on the baffling picture, but in vain. It was not much larger than his thumb nail, and so faint and dim that it was impossible to see more than the ghost of a face.

Jack at length snatched it from him in disgust.

"If that's the best you kin do, you'd best go soak your topknot. Ain't ye got no idears?"

"Nein! Never had none o' dem dings."

"Come with me, then. I've got an idear."

He led the way from the shed and into the street, not caring whether Hans followed or not. But the avaricious Dutch boy was not going to lose sight of his golden prize.

A short distance brought him to a photograph room, with its flaring array of pictures at the door.

Jack plunged in without hesitation, followed by Hans.

The photographer came forward to meet his unpromising customers, as politely as if they had been princes.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"Kin you make a picture out o' this?" asked Jack, boldly. "I've hearn somebody say as faded out pictures kin be fotygrafeed, and brought out ag'in. Jist take a squint at that physiog."

The artist took the medallion, and gazed at it

intently for several minutes, while his questioner waited in suspense.

"Where did you get this?" he asked.

"That ain't got nothin' to do with photografin' it."

"Don't be quite so sharp, my lad."

"I calkerlate to pay fur the job."

"There's not much of a picture left," remarked the artist. "I won't promise to make a very clear copy."

"Kin you fetch the face out, so's we can tell whether it's a man or a monkey?"

"I think so."

"And what'll be the charge?"

"Two dollars."

"That's steep," declared Jack, with a wince. "Can't you discount that?"

"No. I won't try it for less."

"Slide ahead then. I want that picture bad. When kin you have it?"

"In two or three days."

"All correck. Come ahead, Hans. I'll drive round 'bout Friday."

"Very well," said the photographer, still studying the medallion portrait.

The boys left the establishment.

"How's biz, Dutchy?" asked Jack.

"Blenty."

"Then slide. Ye're wastin' time. I've got other fish to fry than to go taggin' round with you at my heels."

"You can go vry yer vish," cried Hans, indignantly. "I don't vants 'em, nein."

Jack strode away whistling. Little he cared for the Dutch boy's indignation.

He had, as he said, a job in hand. That was to make the round of the hotels, and examine the registers for the name of Reece Logan, wife and child.

This was no trifle of a task. The city had numerous hotels, large and small, and the diligent scout was determined to miss none of them. For the next three days he was busily employed, meeting disappointments in quick succession.

As may be imagined, he was not very favorably welcomed by the clerks of the more aristocratic hotels. But Jack had a reserve stock of assurance sufficient to carry him past even the importance of a hotel clerk.

He managed to gain his end in every case, but it looked as if he was going to fail. He had come down to the smallest places of entertainment, and yet no trace of the desired name was found. He began to think that his man must have signed a false name.

It was evening of the third day of this fruitless search. Tired, hungry and disappointed, Jack turned his steps toward home. It was dark, and a faint drizzle of rain was falling. The night promised to be a chill and uncomfortable one.

As he approached the street of his home he struck up a lively whistle by way of rousing up his spirits. He was whistling loudly when he reached his house door.

It suddenly opened, and the face of his mother appeared. It was as white as the wall, and had a scared and excited look.

"Is that you, Jack?" she hastily called.

"Yes. What's wrong, mom? You look fearful skeered."

"Oh, the terriblest thing, Jack. I'll never, never, never, get over it."

"But what is it?"

The excited boy pushed past her into the house, and looked eagerly round. His first thought was for Minny. She was gone.

"Minny!" he cried, in a shudder of dread.

"What has happened? Where is Minny?"

"Stolen!"

"Stolen?"

"She was playing at the door. It was suddenly pushed open, and a man snatched her up and ran. Tom and Joe are after him."

Jack stood as if paralyzed.

"When was this?" he faltered.

"Not five minutes ago."

Jack staggered for an instant, resting his hand on the back of a chair. Then he turned and dashed out into the darkness. In a moment his flying form was swallowed up by the shadows of the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SNATCH AND A PLUNGE.

WILDLY into the darkness went the distracted boy, not knowing whither his feet were taking him. He had come to love Minny as the apple of his eye, and he was completely distracted at the thought of her loss. It was the merest chance that took his steps in the direction of the wharves.

He had gone about a couple of squares when

a sound of loud lamentation came to his ears. And under a street-lamp he caught a glimpse of a diminutive figure, holding on to the lamp-post, and crying bitterly.

"Who's that?" cried Jack sharply, recognizing something familiar. "Is that you, Tom?"

"Ye-e-es!" sobbed the boy. "It's me—me."

"And what ails you? What are you blubberin' about?" Jack gave him an impatient shaking.

"He cotched me arter him, and he k—kicked me," faltered Tom.

"Ha! Which way did he go?"

"To the wharves. J—Joe's arter him."

"To the wharves? You git home, snippy, and dry yer eyes."

Jack was away again like a shot. But now he knew better what he was about. Straight for the river he darted, and along the dark line of Delaware avenue, his keen eyes surveying every object.

He had not gone far ere he came near tumbling headlong over another small figure, that sprung up suddenly from a dark corner. It was his brother Joe, the second of the small scouts.

"That you, Jack?"

"Guess so. Is it you, Joe?"

"Down this way, Jack. He ain't fur ahead."

Joe ran on, leading the way. His steps led toward a wharf just in advance of them.

"There he is. On No. 10. He's got Minny. I kept right arter him."

Jack's eyes lighted up. There was something in the words "No. 10" that seemed to give him an idea. The figure of a man was visible on the dimly-lighted wharf, peering over into the water.

"You hang back, Joe," whispered Jack. "Don't you show yerself."

The bold boy hurried to the wharf, in a crouching attitude. On reaching it he concealed himself behind a post, and peered out to see what the man was about.

There was something now visible in the dark water. It seemed to be a boat, and the faint sound of oars could be heard.

"Set her up here!" said the man in a cautious tone. "Hurry up, Sal. We're wasting time."

The boat grated against the wharf log, as Jack made a hasty dart forward to another post, not five feet distant from the man. Peering cautiously over, he could see that there was a woman in the boat.

"Ready, Sal?" asked the man in the same low tone. "Here, stand by to take the brat. Time's skeerce. I'm afeard them little w'iffs might rouse the alarm."

There was evidently something wrapped in a cloak in his arms. He removed the cloak as he prepared to hand his burden down to the woman. Instantly the sharp peal of a child's cry broke on the air.

"Drat the ugly brat, I've a mind to choke its pipes. Stand by, gal. We must be off from here like greased lightnin'. Don't want the harbors on our heels. Here's the squallin' critter."

He held the child over the wharf log. The woman in the boat reached up her arms to take it. She was some distance below and he had to bend well over.

At that instant a dark form shot hastily up, and snatched the crying child from his arms. At the same time the stooping ruffian received a push that sent him reeling. Only a hasty clutch at the wharf log saved him from going headlong overboard.

He sprung to his feet with a savage oath, and looked round for his assailant. There was a slender form grasping the child, and running rapidly across the wharf.

With a yell of rage the man started in pursuit. It was Firefly Jack who had given him this send, and who now was flying with the prize.

A grim smile came to the ruffian's lips as he followed. The boy was running toward the opposite corner of the wharf, instead of back to the street.

"The young hound's skeered out of his wits," muttered the ruffian. "I've got him now. It's queer if I don't cure him of meddling."

In fact Jack seemed to have got himself into a trap. There was not another soul in sight except little Joe, back on the avenue. He had run to a corner of the wharf. The burly ruffian was close behind him, with a laugh of hoarse triumph. Jack paused on the wharf log and looked back.

"I've got you, you 'skeeter'" cried the ruffian. "See if I don't settle yer hash."

"Catch yer 'skeeter first," retorted Jack.

And then something happened that considerably surprised the confident pursuer. The cornered boy, clasping his prize closely with one arm, leaped from the wharf log into the dark, flowing tide of the river below.

With a growl of rage and wonder the man ran up. Below him the bubbling ripples were closing over the spot where the boy had vanished. All was still. Jack and Minny had disappeared below the gloomy waters.

In utter surprise the fellow peered to the right and left. For two minutes he stood there gazing eagerly on all sides. There was no reappearance, although the light of a lamp on the next wharf sent its rays streaming over the waves.

"By thunder and lightnin'! if the tarrier ain't drowned himself and the brat, I'm a jackass! Lord! he couldn't suited me better. It's so much trouble saved."

He dashed back across the wharf, leaped with a hasty spring into the boat, and seized the oars.

"There's the very Old Nick to pay, Sal!" he declared. "The boy that snatched the brat has jumped overboard, and they've gone to Davy Jones together. Grab the tiller, old gal."

He rowed hastily out and around the wharf, to the spot where Jack had disappeared. No trace of the man was visible. The man stooped to the water's edge and looked long and far for a possible diminutive head on the dark level. Nothing was to be seen. Jack had evidently not come up after his plunge. If his head had been above the water it could not have escaped that pair of keen eyes.

"Reckon he struck something when he went down, and knocked out his senses," muttered the ruffian. "He's done the job for us neat. Couldn't done it better ourselves. We'd best git, for ther' mought be hot water round here afore long."

He rowed hastily away, the silent woman at the helm steering. In a few minutes he was well out in the river, and was heading rapidly down-stream.

No form was on the wharf except that of little Joe, who had ventured up and was peering into the river. But the dark water flowed on as sullenly and smoothly as before. Not a trace of living being appeared upon it. Its dead were out of the reach of human vision. Firefly Jack seemed to have made his final leap. The river had taken him to itself, and Minny's troubled life seemed ended, with that of her brave champion.

Meanwhile other events of interest were taking place elsewhere in the city. We must look up some of the various trains of action which Jack had elsewhere set afloat.

A very important one of these was the search for the man who had fled from the hospital. The constable had failed to find anybody of the kind at the address given. That house was occupied by a quiet family, none of whose members were missing, and none of them in the hospital.

The whole detective service of the city was set at work. Detective Clark, who had particularly noticed the man's face, took the matter actively in hand. But so far no trace of the missing individual had been found. He had given them all the slip.

While this was going on, Mr. Howard Bronson was making active use of the telegraph, in his inquiry for Reece Logan. He had first wired to the authorities of Sacramento, and learned that the man had left that city many years before, for a mining-town in Nevada. He had then telegraphed them to have him traced, at any expense, and that he would foot the bill.

During the three days that had intervened he had waited patiently, and now had just received the following telegram from the police authorities of Sacramento:

"Have tracked your man to San Francisco, four years ago. He then had a faro bank on Dettaven street. There was a fight in his concern. One man shot, another knifed. It is said that Logan used the pistol. The Vigilance Committee began to talk, and he found it convenient to slide, between two days. Can find no further trace of him. Supposed that he started East, by the overland route, and was gobbed up by the Apaches. Nothing known. That sort die hard. Likely he may be found somewhere East. Not married when he left Frisco. The wife you speak of must have been picked up East of the Rockies.

J. DUGALD,

"Chief of Police,

"Sacramento.

"Will send bill of expenses by mail."

Mr. Bronson fell into a deep study. Here was a bar to his researches. How should he take up this lost trail? But one way suggested itself to

him. The man was a gambler in grain. He would be hardly likely to give up his favorite pursuit in the East. It would be well to make inquiry of the police authorities of the cities of the Mississippi valley, and of the mining-towns further west.

He prepared a series of telegrams for this purpose, and started out to the telegraph office. Mr. Bronson was deadly in earnest in this business. The excitement and mystery of it interested him. He had a little too much leisure, and was glad of any occupation. And the outrageous character of the murder had so roused his benevolent soul that he cared nothing for the expense.

But we must leave him to his devices and look after another of Jack's threads of discovery.

As may be imagined Dutchy was not at rest. The loss of the golden trinket had stirred to the depth his avaricious soul. He was bitter against Jack for taking it from him, and was determined to have it back, by hook or crook.

He spent all his spare time hanging about the door of the photograph saloon, trying to devise some plan to get the locket from the hands of the photographer.

After stirring up in his brain a dozen absurd plans, none of which could have worked, he took the course which any boy of sense would have taken at the start. He made his way to the presence of the photographer.

"Yoost come in ter see if you got der pictur," he announced to the artist.

"Ah, yes. You are one of the two boys that left me the medallion to copy."

"It was me unt Firefly Jack. You git der pictur?"

"Yes," was the pleasant answer. "I have had very good success. It came out much clearer than I expected. It is not a good picture, of course, but it is easy to make out the face. Wait. I will show it to you."

In a minute he brought up the photograph, and gave it to Hans to inspect. It was, as he said, somewhat blurred and indistinct, but there was plainly the portrait of a rather handsome face, with full mustache and whiskers. It was not altogether an agreeable face. There was something peculiar about the mouth and eyes. But to a poor judge of human nature there might have been nothing lacking in that countenance.

"Bery goot," remarked Hans. "You got der little goold ding?"

"The locket? Oh, yes."

"I take der locket. Leave der pictur' fur Jack. You gib me der locket."

"All right, my boy. Two dollars, if you please."

"Jack, he pay dat."

"Not much," answered the artist. "I want some security for my work. And I calculate to keep the locket till I get the cash."

Hans scratched his head and looked sheepish.

"Jack pay. You kin troost Jack."

"Two dollars, or get out."

"How mooth der locket wort?" asked Hans, with a sigh.

"I don't know. Five or ten dollars."

"I gib von tollar. Jack gib t'other."

"Be off, you scapegrace. I can't spend all day chattering with you."

With a deep groan Hans thrust his hand deep in his pocket. He drew up a lot of small change, which he counted as if it cut him deeply to let go of every coin.

The sum amounted to a little more than two dollars, and he laid it down with a look of anguish.

"Yoost gib me der locket. It's too pad, so it am. Like ter punch Jack's head. Sure it's wort' five tollar!"

"Yes, at the lowest. Here it is." He handed over the locket and raked in the money. "And here's your picture."

"Nein, nein; I leab dat fur Jack. He punch my head if I dake it. I only want der pooty goold ding as Jack dook from me."

Pocketing his prize, Hans left the room, divided in heart between pain and pleasure. He had the locket, but he was out two precious dollars. The photographer looked after him curiously.

"He's a queer one," he said. "The whole business is a queer one. I wonder where the boys got that locket, and what they want to do with the picture?"

CHAPTER IX.

A DEN OF MURDERERS.

In a poorly-furnished room of a small and dilapidated house, in one of the disreputable streets of Philadelphia in the vicinity of the Schuylkill

river, sat a man to whom we must pay some attention.

He was a tall, stoutly-built person of full face, and would have passed generally as a handsome man. Yet there was something decidedly sinister in the expression of his eyes, and a tigerish curl just now in his thin lips. His face was beardless, save for a short mustache, which seemed to have been just started.

"I hope to Jupiter they'll do the job right," he said to himself, with a frowning scowl. "I must get rid of every link. I'd hate to see any harm come to the brat. It's my own flesh and blood, after all. But Sal'll take good care of it. She can be kind enough where there's money at stake."

He drew from his pocket a thick memorandum-book. This he opened and took from it some papers.

"Let me see," he said, musingly. "I fancy every point in the game is well laid. Here's the doctor's certificate of the death of Jenny Logan of heart disease, and here's the record of burial. Those points are all in shape. Lucky there was no name found on that woman, and her tongue was stilled before it got in shape to speak. The whole game is working neatly. I cannot fail to handle the cash. It's fortunate that I got a will made in my favor before Jenny got struck with heart disease."

The sneer on his lips was something devilish as he spoke these words.

"I hated her! Blast her, I hated her like rank poison! She was the bane of my life. And she wouldn't give me a penny of that devilish money. She did not know the man she had to deal with. I'll have it all now. I'll have it all. And without her pious incumbrance."

He paused and listened. There were sounds below. He hastily returned the papers to his book, and replaced it in his breast-pocket.

A lower door appeared to open, and steps were heard on the floor.

"It must be Jerry and Sal," he muttered. "I hope they've done the job. It's the only point now that stands between me and success."

He hastily left the room and descended the stairs. Opening a door below he entered an apartment, in which stood two persons, a man and a woman. The man was taking off his heavy coat, and the woman her bonnet. The faces were those of the two persons with whom Firefly Jack had had his adventure.

"How is this?" cried the villain, with a scowl of anger and disappointment. "Empty-handed? Where's the child? Don't dare tell me you've failed!"

"Not exactly failed," answered the man called Jerry. "I don't often do things by halves, Mr. Williams. It's turned out a little better than you built on, that's all."

"How? Explain yourself."

"The brat'll never bother you any more."

"Don't speak of it!" cried Sal, turning away with a look of horror.

"What do you mean?"
"I mean that the kid's at the bottom of the Delaware. Gone to Davy Jones fer sartain. Don't look at me so savage. I didn't do it. But it's done, and there's no helping it."

"The deuce! Do you mean to say that she's drowned? Out with it!" He caught Jerry by the shoulder, and shook him in his excitement.

"It wasn't my fault, I say. Set down, and I'll tell you all about it."

Mr. Williams, as Jerry had called him, sunk into a chair. His first expression of anger and dismay had passed away, and a new look, in which there was some secret satisfaction, marked his face.

As for the story told by the ruffian the reader already knows it. It was that of the stealing of little Minny, her rescue by Jack, and the drowning of Jack and his prize.

Sal left the room during the story. Bad as she was at heart she could not bear the thought of baby murder. She was no angel, but she was not a fiend.

The interview between the two men lasted for some time.

"It is a bad business, Mr. Williams," said Jerry at length, "but your track is clear. As for me I am a marked man. That devilish boy spotted me in the hospital. It's mighty lucky he's gone. But the detectives have me nailed. I can't stay in this city. You must fork over the spoil, and I'll slide for the West. If they nab me it's all up with the whole party."

"You wouldn't blow?" demanded Mr. Williams, licking his lips.

"Wouldn't I?" returned Jerry with an oath.

"Maybe not. But if I get scragged it won't be without company. We'll all sink or swim together in this job, mind that."

Mr. Williams looked at him doubtfully, and then burst into a loud laugh.

"I fancy we can pull through, Jerry. Since you've shaved off your whiskers I don't believe they'd know you. Wait. I think it would improve your beauty to give your nose a blossom."

He proceeded to make some skillful improvements in Jerry's face, by the aid of paint and a stick of carbon. By the time he was through it would have taken a sharp eye to recognize the countenance.

"There. Take a peep in the glass. I don't believe you will know yourself."

At this moment Sal re-entered, with a look of importance on her face. She gazed at Jerry's countenance, and then broke into a laugh.

"That's good. I don't believe I would have known you, if I'd run across you in the street. The cops won't twig you in that gear."

"Hope they won't. Some on 'em is devilish sharp, though."

"But there's something else afoot. Something about you, Mr. Williams."

"Ha! What do you mean?"
"You know I've had my boy Harry tracking them two young rascals. You remember how he tracked them to other day to a photograph saloon?"

"Yes, yes," cried Mr. Williams anxiously.

"What did it mean? Have you learned anything?"
"Yes. Something of importance. My boy is wide awake as they make them. He's hit something, I've a notion."

Mr. Williams sank into his chair, looking slightly pale.

"Go on," he said doubtfully.

"Harry nicked the Dutch boy to-day. He's the safest to follow, for the other street rat is as sharp as a razor. Anyhow he tracked Dutchy to the photograph's. He waited at the door till he came out, and then tracked him again. The Dutch boy had something in his hand which he seemed to dreadfully admire. Harry managed to get a glimpse over his shoulder. He says it was a small, round, gold case, about two inches across. Looked something like a small watch."

Mr. Williams turned paler still.

"Jenny's locket," he muttered to himself. "That explains why it was not found.—I must have that," he continued, sharply. "I must have it if we have to choke the boy to get it. And I must know what the boy was doing at the photograph's. There'll be the very devil to pay if we can't block this game. Those infernal boys have got some deviltry afoot."

The three conspirators seated themselves and entered into a long conference. It seemed clear that there was danger in the wind. Murder can be traced at times by the merest shadow, and there was a black shadow on their trail. The pallid look on the chief villain's face hung there during the conference. He seemed thoroughly frightened. There was no telling how much these boys knew.

An hour passed before the conference ended, and their plans were laid.

Leaving the room, Sal made her way to a kitchen in the rear. Here lay on a wooden settee a boy of about fifteen years of age. His clothing was very coarse and ragged, and there was a preternaturally sharp look on his starved face.

He sprung from the settee when the woman entered, and looked up eagerly, as if in expectation of something of interest.

"I s'pose you're hungry?"
"Wuss nor a rat," growled the boy.

"Well, here's a dry crust. If you're hungry you can gnaw at that. Put through what I want now, and I'll give you a gay supper when you come back."

"I'm yer 'oss," grumbled the wharf rat, as he crunched his crust with sharp teeth. "Let it out."

A short conversation ensued. The boy finished his sorry meal, and grabbed his hat.

"Reckon I kin," he said, as he left the house.

It was now a late hour in the night. The streets were dark and deserted. The slight drizzle of the evening had now settled into a sharp rain. But to this the boy paid no attention. He seemed too much used to hardship to trouble himself about such a trifling as an April rain.

Along the streets he went, square after square. Here and there a belated traveler made his way along under cover of an umbrella. A group or two of midnight loiterers staggered by, with drunken songs and oaths. He passed one or two policemen, sheltering themselves in dark corners. For nearly two miles the boy's route continued. He was thoroughly drenched, but he seemed to care little for that.

Finally he reached a fence which was closed

by a gate. The boy looked at it. It was about seven feet high. But in front of a neighboring tobacco store was a sign stand of about four feet in height. Quickly carrying this to the fence, the active young vagrant managed to reach its top, and to draw himself up. In a minute more he had reached the ground inside the fence.

He was in a stable-yard. He looked around him. There was an open shed on one side. Adjoining this was a stable, covered by a hay-loft. A short ladder rested against it, leading to a partly open window in the loft.

The boy did not hesitate for a moment. He seemed to have his whole work laid out in his head. He was quickly up the ladder and in the loft.

Here all was pitch dark. He paused and listened. There came to his ear the sound of a faint snore. It seemed to come from a point close by, to his left.

The shrewd scout drew the window shut, and struck a match. Its light flashed through the mow. There, not three feet from him lay the broad form of Dutchy, sound asleep, his body half-buried in the hay. The snore came from his capacious nose.

"Lucky he's a snoozer. I'd had to fit him if he'd been awake," muttered the scout.

Holding the match over the form of the prostrate lad, the intruder slipped his fingers, with the skillful touch of a professional thief, into the pockets of the unconscious victim.

The match flickered and went out. But at that same instant something flashed yellow in its expiring ray. It was some object which had been drawn from the pocket of the sleeper.

Dutchy groaned and rolled over. The thief drew back, and remained as still as death. He waited patiently till the disturbed lad settled to his rest again. Not until the light snore rose once more from Dutchy's nose did his visitor venture to move toward the ladder.

In an hour afterward the youthful pickpocket entered the house near the Schuylkill. He found the woman waiting up for him.

"What luck?" she asked, eagerly.
"Prime. Yere's the plunder. Now fur that grub."

He handed her the golden locket.
"Good. How did you work it?"

"Guv me the grub, and I'll tell yer. I'm as holler as two pigs."

In an hour afterward slumber reigned supreme in that house of crime.

The sun was well up the next morning before its inmates aroused. They had slept the sleep of peace and innocence.

At ten o'clock that morning the woman called Sal made her appearance at the photograph's. That gentleman accosted her with his usual politeness.

"Good-morning, madam. What can I do for you?"

"Do you recognize this locket?" asked Sal, producing the golden trinket.

"Yes," he answered in surprise. "I have just photographed the faded-out picture in it."

"For two boys?"

"Yes."

"The young rascals," she cried, with a show of spleen. "They stole it, drat them! The young vagabonds!"

"Why, I thought it a strange freak."

"Where is the photograph, sir?"

"Here."

Sal took it. A change came over her face as she looked at it. It bore a strong resemblance to Mr. Williams, except in the full beard which it showed.

"I want this," she said.

"Excuse me. I have no right to deliver it, except to the party that ordered it."

In an instant she tore it into a dozen pieces, and thrust them into her pocket.

"There," she cried spitefully. "I'll settle the game of the young devils. They are thieves and vagabonds, I tell you. But of course you must be paid for your work. How much do I owe you?"

"Two dollars," said the photographer dryly.

"Here it is. I'm much obliged to you, sir. But I've settled the game of those little rascals, drat their pictures!"

She left the saloon with an angry face, that turned into a look of triumph when she gained the street.

"He shall bleed well for this," she said to herself. "I have saved him from the gallows. But Jerry and I must slope."

The photographer rubbed his hands, as he closed the door on his customer.

"That wasn't bad," he said. "Four dollars for the job. There's something very queer about this business. But there's one thing my lady

forgot. She did not ask for the negative. She does not dream that I can have fifty copies of that picture before night."

CHAPTER X.

DUTCHY SCORES A POINT.

It looked as if the ruffians had triumphed. Firefly Jack was, to all appearance, at the bottom of the Delaware. The locket had been recovered and the photograph destroyed. The detectives were all at sea. Nothing remained to show the identity of the murdered woman, and not the slightest trace of her murderer had been found. Crime was successful. Justice had failed.

And yet all was not as bright for the criminals as they fondly fancied. There were things at work of which they did not dream. Circumstances were gathering against them.

Sal had not gone far from the photographer's ere she drew the locket forth, and looked at it with a laugh of triumph.

"It's fun, the neat way I fooled that picture chap," she muttered. "There won't be no trouble with that photograph. But isn't this a pretty thing? Mr. Williams has got to give it to me."

She continued to admire it as she walked onward, utterly unaware that there were other eyes on the jewel.

Yet the small, twinkling eyes of Hans, the Dutch boy, had caught the glitter of the golden toy, and recognized his lost treasure from the opposite side of the street.

We must go back a step in our story to learn how Hans came there so opportunely. He had that morning got up and gone about his stable duties as usual. It was less than an hour before that he had chance to put his hand in his pocket, and discovered the loss of his valued treasure.

The boy fairly danced with rage and dismay at the discovery. It was not alone the trinket but the two dollars, the savings of a month, that he had expended for the treasure.

It was a half-hour before he could get his distracted brains into shape. What had become of the jewel? He searched the stable-yard and the haymow thoroughly, thinking it might have fallen from his pocket. He accused all the stable hands of taking it, and got soundly cursed by one and kicked by another for his pains.

Finally it struck him that the photographer must have played some trick on him—exchanged the golden toy for a dry leaf, perhaps. Hans had read of such things. Without a moment's hesitation he set out to investigate the artist.

It was while on his way there that a lucky chance had thrown the glint of the locket in Sal's hand into his eyes. He looked across the street, saw the golden ornament between her fingers, and recognized it at sight.

The boy stopped spellbound. This seemed to him almost the work of magic. His first inclination was to rush across, snatch it from her hand, and accuse her of theft.

But ere he regained his wits, she had passed on. A feeling of prudence came into his brain. Any such hasty movement might get him into trouble, and Hans had no fancy for this. It struck him that it would be safer and more sensible to follow the woman. If he found out once where she lived, he could lay his plans afterward to recover the trinket.

No sooner thought than done. He put himself on the track of the woman, who walked on without a thought of pursuit.

Hans was not much of a scout, and would certainly have been discovered by any wide-awake thief. But Sal was so wrapped up in her success, and so utterly undreaming of pursuit, that an elephant might have followed her without being perceived. She walked straight on, without once looking back, or making the least effort to conceal her course.

The Dutch boy thus had no difficulty in tracking her to the house by the Schuylkill, the den of mystery and crime.

She entered and closed the door behind her. Dutchy stood looking at the outside of the house. It was a very doubtful neighborhood. It looked like the resort of a dangerous class. He stood scratching his head, in doubt what to do. There was not much courage about Hans, and he had no desire to get into difficulty.

And now, for the first time, the thought came to him that he might be mistaken. Perhaps it was not his treasure after all. There were many such things, and he might have been on a fool's chase. He thought for a moment. He had first seen the woman near the photographer's. Could she have come from there? He would go back and see.

First noting particularly the number and situation of the house, Hans started to return. A half-hour brought him into the neighborhood of the photograph gallery.

He stood for a moment in the doorway, gazing at the case of pictures there displayed, and trying to work up his courage to face the artist.

"It's my goold ding, anyway," he muttered. "Dey stoled it vrom me. Unt dey stoled mine two tollars. It's shoost too pad, ash ever vas."

He started forward indignantly.

At that moment a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a familiar voice sounded in his ear.

"Hold yer hosses there, Dutchy. What's bu'sted? Ain't goin' arter the pictur' nor nothin', hey?"

It was the voice of Firefly Jack. Hans turned with a start. There was the face of his comrade, looking at him with keen but humorous eyes.

It was Jack himself, and no ghost. The Delaware had not swallowed him up after all. In some strange way he had escaped from the ravenous river, and was still in the land of the living.

But of all this adventure Hans knew nothing. All he knew was that he had recovered and lost the trinket, and he trembled at the sight of Jack's face. He feared that there might be some settling of accounts.

"Guess I'll go shoost pack to der stable," he said. "You go in dere. I'll go pack."

"No you won't go back. You'll go with me. See here, Dutchy, what a'e you shakin' about? And yer cheeks is as white as a lamb's wool. You've been up to some trick, you dirty rascal. Come ahead now, or I'll fetch you up by the ear."

Jack was so fierce that Hans did not dare disobey. He followed him up the stairs and into the saloon, though trembling every step with dread of an explosion.

The photographer met them with something of a doubtful look, his eyes surveying one after the other of his visitors.

"Well?" he asked.

"I dropped round after that photygraf," said Jack. "I'spose it's ready."

"I fancy it is," answered the artist, coolly. "And if you are wise you'll skip while your skin's whole. I've found you out, you little rascals. You stole the locket and brought it here. I've given it and the photograph to its right owner, and you'd best slide."

Jack dropped into a chair, and looked at him quizzically. Hans gave vent to a groan. His fears seemed confirmed.

"You have, have you?" queried Jack. "That's mighty kind, that's my notion. But I'll just tell you what it is. I happen to know a magistrate, that keeps a constable. And if you don't guv me back that there gold concern mighty quick I'll just sell out yer old 'stablishment. I'm only a boy, maybe, but I know a p'int 'bout the law."

The artist seemed a little confused at Jack's bold and confident tone, and at his indignant manner. He looked at Hans.

"See here," he cried. "I'd like to know more about this queer business. This youngster came here yesterday and got the locket back from me. He paid me the two dollars for the job."

Jack turned his eyes sharply on Hans, who trembled at the gaze.

"This morning a woman came here. Not a very nice person. She had the locket with her. She vowed it had been stolen, and demanded the photograph. I showed it to her, and she tore it into twenty pieces. Then she left taking the locket with her."

Jack looked from one to the other, his eyes full of scorn and anger.

"You've done it between you," he declared. "You've done it neat. See here, Dutchy, my mad's gettin' up. 'Fore long I'll punch you till yer mammy wouldn't know you. So ye're playin' on me, are you? How did that there woman git the thing?"

"I dunno," answered the trembling Hans. "It was stoled vrom me last night. I see'd her dis mornin' wid it, unt voller'd her. I knows vere she lifs."

"Ha! You do? Solid earnest? That's some- thin' anyhow. Tell you what, there's deviltry afloat somewhere. They'd played a traverse on us. But I'd guv somethin' fur that photygraf. What was it like, anyhow?"

"It was a man's face," answered the photographer. "A handsome, bearded fellow, with thin lips, long nose, and doubtful eyes."

"The murderer, for a thousand!"

"The murderer?"

"See here, mister, you've sp'iled the nicest bit o' fun you ever see'd, by losing that photygraf. I'd guv five dollars fur it."

"I can easily give you another," answered the artist. "I've got the negative."

Jack jumped up and cracked his heels with joy.

"Why didn't you say that an hour ago? I want another. And in double quick time, too. That's gay. When kin you have it?"

"As soon as the sun comes out."

"Gay and lively. I'm good fur two dollars when it's ready. That's the figure. I'll be back here right after the sun's out. Come, Hans. I want yer to show me where that woman lives. And thank yer stars if I don't guv you a firefly yet, between the eyes. You want a scorchin', you do, the wu'st way."

But we must go ahead of the boys, and return to the house which they are in search of. There are events going on there that are likely to prove of interest to us.

Sal's face was full of gratification when she entered the house. She felt that she had succeeded remarkably well in her enterprise, and had earned a present of the trinket as a reward for her smartness. The locket had so taken her fancy, that she was wild with desire to possess it.

Jerry and Mr. Williams were seated in a room on the second floor, overlooking the street, when she entered.

They looked at her inquiringly.

"What luck?" demanded Jerry.

"Look at that," she replied, taking the fragments of the torn photograph from her pocket, and flinging them on the table. "Just put them together, and see what sort of a picture they make."

They did so, fitting the fragments together with some difficulty. Mr. Williams turned white and broke into a cold sweat as he gazed upon the pictured face that looked up to his.

It was himself. The heavy whiskers changed the expression of the face somewhat, but any judge would have recognized the identity of the two faces at once.

"Good Heavens!" he hissed. "That was a narrow escape. If that picture had got into the hands of the detectives it might have been a sorry day for me. I'm afraid of those boys."

"They're all right," answered Jerry. "The worst one's drowned. The other's a stupid Dutch fool, that's got no brains."

"But I fancy this town is a little too hot to hold me. And you too, for that matter. Our work is about done here."

"The sooner I git out the better I'll like it," growled Jerry in reply.

"What are you going to give me for this job?" asked Sal.

"Don't fear but you'll both get enough. You know our bargain. And you know me of old, Jerry Thompson. This isn't the first ugly job we've had together. Didn't I always come up on the square?"

"I never said as you didn't," answered Jerry.

"But Jerry ain't me," rejoined Sal. "I've took a fancy to this bit of gold, and I think I've earned it."

"Oh, that's what you want? Very well. You can have it. But hand it here first."

He took the trinket, opened it, and looked at the faint picture within.

"You are welcome to it, Sal. But nobody shall have the chance to photograph this picture again."

With the blade of his penknife he scratched the faded miniature until no trace of it was left.

"There. That's settled," he said grimly, as he returned the locket to the woman.

Sal quickly left with her treasure, her face radiant with delight. The two men continued their conversation.

An hour passed. Jerry rose from his chair and strolled carelessly to the window.

"Texas is my ground," he said. "I've been there afore, and know the ropes. And—By the Lord, what's that?"

He staggered back as if he had received a rifle-bullet, and was only saved by the table from falling headlong to the floor. His face was white as cheese.

"Hello!" exclaimed Williams. "What hit you?"

"That face! Look out, keersful! Is there a boy across the street?"

"Yes. He's lookin' at the house."

"Then it's not a ghost!"

"What the blazes do you mean?"

"Let me look ag'in. It's him, fur a pony. It's the boy that jumped overboard with the kid. Good Lord, is he alive yet?"

"Are you sure?"

"Sure as thunder."

A blue look came about Mr. Williams's lips. His eyes flashed.

"That's your sure job, is it?" he hissed. "He not only escaped you, but he has tracked the house. We are in a devil of a danger, Jerry Thompson. That boy must be done for or all's up. Dead boys tell no tales."

There was a murderous look upon his cream-white face.

"Leave it to me," cried Jerry fiercely, starting for the stairs.

"Stop, you fool. If the boy sees you he will be off like a killdeer. He must be coaxed into the house. Put Sal to work. She's cunning as a fox. And if he comes in once, he must not go out again. You understand?"

He would have been a blind man who did not understand that look.

Mr. Williams and Jerry went down-stairs. In a few minutes afterward Sal Thompson appeared at the door of the house. She had her bonnet on, as if ready to go somewhere.

On a stoop opposite sat a boyish form. He was apparently engaged in admiring the inside of his cap. Sal did not look toward him, but walked on down the street. With seeming carelessness she had left the door of the house ajar.

In a minute she turned the adjoining corner. The boy's quick eyes had noticed that the door was not closed. He stole a quick glance at the windows of the house. No one was visible.

There seemed an opportunity to investigate. In an instant he rose and shot across the street. He pushed the door a little further open. It was shadowy within. He saw before him a narrow entry, in which no person was visible.

"I'll take a squint inside, anyhow," he muttered.

Pushing the door further open he stepped inside. He paused with a scared look. He had heard something that sounded like suppressed breathing.

But ere he could make another movement an arm shot out from behind the door, and a heavy fist fell with a crushing blow on the boy's head.

He staggered and fell senseless to the floor. The door was closed with a slam.

"Got him, by blazes!" hissed a sharp voice.

"Good," came another voice, followed by the sound of rapid steps.

A minute afterward Sal returned, and entered the house. The reckless boy had fallen blindly into the trap laid for him.

But there was one thing which the murderous crew failed to see. For at this moment another boy rose from behind a doorstep further down the street. It was Dutchy Jack's companion.

"Don't shoost like dat," he muttered. "Firefly Jack's von big fool. Mein Gott, but he moost be in drubble. Dere's got to be somethin' did, dat's sure."

CHAPTER XI.

JACK GETS IN A FIREFLY.

INSIDE the den of villainy all seemed triumphant. Every danger appeared removed from the path of the criminals. The locket had been recovered, the photograph destroyed, and now the young sleuth-hound who had followed them so closely had been trapped.

Firefly Jack lay prostrate and insensible on the floor. He had received a stuning blow from Jerry's hard fist, and for the time all the life was taken out of him.

His three foes stood over him, looking down with triumph on his motionless form.

"Didn't I fetch the little ninny neat?" queried Sal. "I opened the trap, and my mouse walked right into its jaws."

"What is to be done with him?" asked Mr. Williams, with a dark scowl.

"Stop his pipes fur good," said Jerry, with a murderous look. "He'll be comin' to hisself and squealin' in ten minutes more. I wouldn't no more mind scraggin' the little wharf-rat than I would stickin' a porker."

"No, no," cried Sal. "None of that, Jerry. We can tie him up and leave him here. I wouldn't kill a mouse except there was somethin' to gain by it."

"Guess ye're 'bout right, Sal," answered Jerry, with a wink to Mr. Williams. "Though he ain't much use to nobody. Go git me a bit o' rope, and I'll truss him up."

Sal departed. The two villains looked at one another with a dark meaning.

"Sal's a bit chicken-hearted," said Jerry. "We've got to handle her gingerly."

"Anyhow it isn't safe to be too hasty," rejoined Mr. Williams. "A dead boy on our hands might be worse than a white elephant. We must first decide how to dispose of the corpse. Tie him up and gag him. To-night, if all goes well—'

He ended by a look that meant murder. Jerry took it in. Those two men fully understood each other.

At that moment Sal returned with a handful of stout cords. In a few minutes afterward the insensible boy was bound, hand and foot. If he had had tenfold life he could not have broken those stout bonds! A choking gag was thrust into his mouth, and bound with a handkerchief behind his head.

"Guess he'll do," sneered Jerry. "He won't blow. Snatch his heels, Mr. Williams."

The two men carried their victim up-stairs and deposited him in an unoccupied room on the rear of the house. It was a room with one window, overlooking the yard.

Little knew Jack of all this. The crushing blow on the temple, and the severe fall, in which his head had struck the floor like a hammer, had utterly scattered his senses. He seemed as completely done for as when the river had closed over his head.

Hours passed by. The day wore on toward evening. The prisoner was left undisturbed until the night was near at hand. Then the door opened and the woman entered the room. There came a quick motion of Jack's eyelids, but when her eyes fell upon him he was, to all appearance, as dead as a log.

"How is he, Sal?" cried Jerry from below.

"No more life than a salt mackerel."

"Lord, I must have fetched him a swiper! Maybe he's settled for good."

She made no answer. After watching the boy for a minute or two, she walked across the room to a bureau that stood against the opposite wall. Opening a drawer of this she took from it a box, and from the latter a glistening trinket, on which her eyes glistened with satisfaction.

She did not dream that another pair of eyes were upon her.

"My! isn't it a pretty thing!" she muttered. "Can't wear it here. But only wait till Jerry and me git to Texas. Guess I'll cut a shine. I'm bound to have a blue-silk gown, and I'll sling this round my neck till I make the women's eyes water."

She held the locket in the rays of the sun to enjoy the bright flash of the gold. Her own eyes flashed as brightly with joy.

"I ain't got nothin' ag'in' the boy," she muttered, "but I'd choke his weasand 'fore he should have this back. Where'll I hide it? I don't believe it's safe there."

She looked around her, and finally squeezed it into a crack in the wall behind the mantle. This she filled up with a handful of broken plaster.

"Bet nobody'll find that. I'm 'feard old Logan mought want it ag'in.—That boy! If he's see'd me I'll choke him!"

She turned hastily and savagely on Jack. But his eyes were tightly closed, and there was not a sign of life in his carcass. She rolled him back and forth with her foot.

"He's done for. He won't blab."

She left the room with an air of satisfaction. She had but fairly done so when Jack's eyes opened wide. He was utterly unable to speak, but there was a look on his face which said plainly:

"Look out, old gal! Jack's alive yet. And he'll open your eyes if you ain't lucky!"

And yet there seemed little hope for the prostrate boy. The night was approaching fast—the night in which his foes designed to end his career.

Night fell. Darkness rapidly spread. It was cloudy and damp. There was the smell of rain in the air. An hour or two passed. Jack lay cold, stiff, and in misery. His limbs were bound so stiffly that circulation was almost stopped. The wooden gag that had been thrust into his mouth stretched his jaws terribly. Since his recovery of his senses he had been in terrible pain, and prayed to himself that if they were going to murder him they might do it quickly. Life was not worth so much torture.

Yet nobody came near him. But stay—what was that? There was a scratching sound outside the house wall. The window began very slowly and carefully to raise. Jack's quick eyes caught sight of something round and black against the dark sky.

There was a pause, and then the window was lifted higher. There seemed to be a living being without, whose eyes were closely surveying every portion of the room.

The gagged prisoner heard a chuckling sound. Then there came a voice in suppressed tones.

"Dat you, Jack?"

It was the voice of Dutchy, but never had

Jack's ears listened to such music. As for answering, that was out of the question.

"Vy don't you say yaw?" asked Hans impatiently. "I got von ladder, und von knife. I ain't peen asleep. Is dat you, Jack?"

Jack bent his knees in response. It was the only sign he could make. But he was terribly afraid the stupid Dutch boy might go away if he got no answer.

Hans, indeed, hesitated for a minute or two. He then, to Jack's inexpressible joy, lifted a leg over the window-sill, and began to crawl in. He was dreadfully slow and cautious. The helpless prisoner trembled for fear some sound below might scare him away.

In a minute more Hans was inside the room, and cautiously approaching. He paused in surprise when he saw Jack's condition.

"Dat's der reason Jack didn't say yaw. 'Cause he couldn't," muttered Hans.

He stooped and drew the knife across the rope on Jack's ankles. It was sharp, and cut through like a razor blade. Another cut or two and his hands were free. Then Hans cut the handkerchief from his head, and removed the gag.

The jaws pained fiercely as Jack sought to shut his mouth. His wrists and ankles felt as if coals of fire had been touched to them. But his heart throbbed with joy and triumph. He was once more free.

He held out his released hands to Dutchy, who lifted him to his feet. Jack staggered like a drunken man. The blood was only beginning to circulate again.

"Keep mum," he whispered. "I'll be all right in a minute."

Hans held him upright until the use of his limbs came back again.

"Vat's der next ding, Jack?" he queried.

"You git out ther winder," answered Jack. "I'm all right now, and I'll follow you like a shot arter a pigeon. Got a little job in hand fu'st."

Hans was quite willing to obey. He was terribly afraid of that place, in spite of his brave effort to rescue his comrade.

As he made his way to the window Jack sought the mantle.

"Bet high my lady don't fling that bit o' gold dust in Texas," he declared. "I'm goin' to open her eyes a trifle."

He sought the spot where she had concealed the trinket, scratched out the plaster, and in a moment it was in his hand.

"Won't she cuss a bit? Maybe not. But I've a notion she will."

He paused suddenly. There was a step on the stairs.

Jack's first impulse was to fly to the window. But there came a second impulse, the desire for revenge. His lips closed firmly and there burned a dangerous glitter in his eyes.

"He clipped me from behind the door. Got a notion to guv him a firefly for his lightnin'-bug."

The hard block of wood which had served as a gag lay on the floor. The handkerchief lay beside it. It was the work of an instant for Jack to pick it up and twist it into the handkerchief. He had a ready made slung-shot. The next moment he was concealed behind the door.

All this was the work of ten seconds. The door pushed open, and the ugly mug of Jerry was pushed in.

"Thought I heered some sort o' cur'us noise up here. Wonder if that dratted rat—Hello! Where the devil's the boy?"

"Here," answered Jack. "And here's your firefly."

Quick as lightning the slung-shot swung through the air, and fell with a loud crack on the left temple of the ruffian. He staggered back through the open door, toward the head of the stairs which came up just outside.

With the quickness of a weasel Jack leaped from his hiding-place. He had dropped his weapon, but his fist fell in his lightning way on the two eyes of the staggering ruffian. This settled the business. Jerry toppled over on his unsteady legs, and tumbled headlong on the stairs, down which he pitched with a rush that shook the old house to its foundation.

For one instant the boy stood and listened to the sounds of alarm below. One short laugh broke from his lips. Then he sprung for the window, and climbed out to the ladder. In a minute he had joined his anxious rescuer below.

"Here," cried Hans. "Vat you stay up dere for? Didn't know you vas von fool?"

He caught Jack's hand and dragged him toward the gate.

"Reckon I ain't much of a fool," returned

Jack. "I stopped on bizness. Strike out, Dutchy. It's hot water here."

Within ten minutes they were nearly a mile away. They stopped in their flight.

"Ye're a hoss, Hans," said Jack. "How did you play it?"

"Shoost dis way," rejoined Hans. "I knowed der vas somefin' wrong, ven you didn't coom out. So I vaits till dark. Den I smells round. I vind der ladder, unt I try all der vinders. Dey vas talkin' loud inside. After while I vind you. I say, Jack.—You no say, yaw.—I dink it a mistake. Den I dink it ain't. Dink I climb in, anyhow. Dat last dink was der pest, Jack. 'Cause you couldn't say yaw fer a parrel of goold. Unt dat's all I knows."

"You're a hoss, Hans. Guy us yer fist. We're goin' to make that reward, old chap. And it's snooks, you mind. Half and half. See here, Dutchy. I got this, too."

He held up the locket in the light of a street lamp. Hans's eyes danced.

"You gib me dat, Jack?"

"It's yourn, old lad. But I want to do somethin' with it fu'st. And you bet high, I ain't goin' to lose no time foolin'. Jist you foller my tracks."

He led the way toward the central station. Here he plunged in with the air of one who owned the place. There was a lieutenant of police in charge. To this man Jack quickly told his story.

"You are the boy, then, that twigg'd the murderer in the hospital?"

"That's my name. And I've got him nailed now. But it's got to be done spry, afore they scoot."

In ten minutes afterward a detail of a half-dozen stout officers was told off. Guided by Jack and Hans they made the best of their way to the scene of the late adventure.

All was quiet when they reached the street, and gained the front of Jerry's domicile. Led by Hans, half the party had gone round to the rear.

A ring at the bell, and a thundering rap on the door, brought no reply.

All continued silent within.

An officer now tried the latch. It opened readily to his touch. It was pitch dark inside.

"Strike a glim, Fred."

The light flashed out, but no person was visible.

The officers entered, and advanced through the rooms, one after another. The furniture remained, but not a living being was found, except a half-starved cat.

"Slid!" cried Jack, in a tone of deep disappointment. "Vamosed, and left us in the lurch! We're sold as cheap as salt mackerel at six cents a grab."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SECRET OF THE LOCKET.

At an early hour of the next day Firefly Jack was up and at work. His first visit was to the photographer's. This personage had been successful in getting a second copy from the negative, which he delivered to his young visitor on payment of the promised two dollars.

"I don't understand all this," he said to Jack. "It is a queer business. What does it all mean?"

"Keep yer left eye squinted on the papers, and I calkelate you'll find out afore many days," answered Jack, briefly, as he walked out.

He looked at his prize with great satisfaction.

"It's Reece Logan fur a fortune," he declared. "There's jist the eyes, nose, and mouth that the Bungtown woman described. And if he ain't sailin' under false colors in that Schuylkill shanty it's queer. What's the next dodge? If I guy this to the perlice they'll snatch the reward and kick me inter the gutter. I ain't no sich jackass as that. I know what I'll do."

He turned sharply on his heel and walked toward Spruce street. A few minutes brought him into the neighborhood of Mr. Bronson's house. Jack boldly rung the bell.

"Mr. Bronson in?" he asked of the servant.

"Yes."

"Tell him a young gentleman wants ter see him."

The girl looked oddly at the visitor. But she remembered him as having called before, and asked him in. Showing him into the parlor she went to call Mr. Bronson.

"This is gallus," muttered Jack, looking round the richly furnished room. "Guess he must be 'most as rich as a king. Lawsee, there's a lookin'-glass big enough to swaller a man up whole."

He walked to the mirror, and surveyed himself from head to foot, with great satisfaction.

"Never knowed ther' was as much of me afore," he muttered. "And 'bout as good-lookin' as they generally make 'em, too."

"Take care you don't break the glass, my lad," came a voice behind him.

"How?" cried Jack, somewhat startled. "I ain't a-touchin' it."

"But that kind of glass won't stand so much beauty, all at once."

Jack turned with a quizzical look.

"Tain't of in I git the chance to brace myself up," he said. "But that ain't biz, Mr. Bronson. I'm here on biz."

"Sit down then, my boy, and we'll talk it over. I've been trying to find your man out West, but I've lost sight of him four years ago."

"I've got sight of him," answered Jack.

"Where?"

"Here."

He put the photograph in Mr. Bronson's hand. That gentleman looked at it with great interest.

"I don't like that face," he remarked. "It is a bad one. You think this represents the murderer? Where did you get it?"

"I'll tell you all 'bout it. I come here to-day 'cause I didn't want to sell my work to the detectives, and let 'em cheat me out of the reward."

"Do the work and the reward's yours."

Jack proceeded to tell the story of his recent adventures, the finding of the locket, the photographing of the picture, and the remainder, up to his escape of the previous night, and the flight of the criminals.

Mr. Bronson listened to him with deep interest. The story was a highly interesting one, and his respect for Jack rapidly increased, as he saw evidence of his wit and shrewdness.

"You were cut out for a detective, my boy," he exclaimed with enthusiasm. "I will not lose sight of you, whether you succeed in this affair or not. Where's your Dutch friend? I would like to see him."

"I'll fotch him round some time. He's a mutton-head of a chap, but he's got some good p'ints. Guess I'd kicked the bucket only fur Hans."

"Have you got that locket?"

"Here it is."

He took the ornament from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Bronson. The latter looked at it with interest.

"Here's where it opens. And here's the pictur as was photograffed," remarked Jack, opening it. "Lawsee, where is it? Well, punch my head if he ain't gone and scratched it all out! Thought we couldn't git another photograff, I reckon."

"I see, I see," answered Mr. Bronson musingly. "But I fancy neither you nor he know all the secrets of this locket." He continued to examine it. "I know something about jewelry, my boy. There is more in this than any of you have found out."

"You don't say so?"

"Just wait. We will see."

He took a knife from his pocket, and inserted the point of the blade in a minute crevice in the edge of the locket. Pushing hard, there came a sharp click. The locket seemed to split into two halves. It had really a double opening, one so close that only a jeweler would have suspected it.

An exclamation of surprise came from the boy's lips.

"My, but you're wide awake! And sure as shootin' ther's a paper inside."

Mr. Bronson had discovered this at the same instant. He drew it out with a hopeful look.

"I shouldn't wonder if we were on the verge of something important. That's a lucky piece of jewelry."

The paper was thin, and folded very closely and tightly, so as to go into the narrow place where it had lain.

The gentleman opened it with hand that slightly shook from excitement. It proved to be a sheet of very thin paper, about eight inches square. Mr. Bronson cast his eyes over it.

"My gracious!" he cried, "this seems to be a big find."

"What is it?" cried Jack, sharply, half-wild with curiosity.

"It is a marriage-certificate. We are on the right track now, my boy. It is the marriage lines of the murdered lady. Reece Logan to Jennie Mayland, three years and a half ago. At Little Rock, Arkansas. We are on the trail now in earnest. Here is the name of the minister and witnesses. Poor woman, she must have had good reason to conceal this paper. I will telegraph to Little Rock at once. I must know what all this means. The bottom of the deviltry lies out there. I fancy we are on the villain's

track now. His plot shall be thoroughly unmasked."

"We are on one end of his track," answered the wide-awake boy; "but ther's another end that's o' more account jist now. And he might swing off at that end if we ain't spry. I brung you the photograff, Mr. Bronson, 'cause I wanted to post you. But the perlice oughter have that instanter."

"That's true. Wait a minute."

Mr. Bronson left the room. He soon returned, ready for the street.

"Come with me, my boy."

We need not follow them in their journey. It will suffice to say that the detective-police were advised of all that had happened, and given the photograph with directions to make instant search for the original of that picture and his two companions, whom Jack described as fully as he could.

Leaving the station, Mr. Bronson made his way to the telegraph office, while Jack strolled homeward, feeling that he had got in his work for the day.

We must leave him for the present, and go in search of the parties on whom he had set the dogs of the law.

They had, as we are aware, made haste to leave their hiding-place after Jack's escape, feeling sure of detection if they remained there. They had gone so hastily, indeed, as to leave everything untouched behind them. They were now in another house, which Reece Logan's shrewd care had provided as a place of refuge in case of danger.

This was in the upper part of the city, and was furnished and ready for instant habitation.

The two villains sat in a room of this mansion, engaged in serious conversation. Jerry looked the worse for wear, with an ugly bruise on his temple, and his right eye in deep mourning.

"We'd best keep shady for the next week or two," said Reece, whom we need no longer call by his assumed name of Mr. Williams. "The cops will be all alive for awhile. It will not be safe to leave the city till they cool down. Every train will be watched."

"I don't intend to go," growled Jerry. "I've got to get even with that boy fu'st. I'm goin' to kill him. The dirty little rat, he knocked me cold. I'll kill him, I tell you! I'll kill him!"

"You have got to catch him first. It won't do for us to show a nose on the street. I've got as big a spite against the boy as you, but our hands are tied, Jerry."

"Much they are," answered Jerry sneeringly. "Reckon we can toddle out after dark, if we can't in daylight. And the young rascal's allers skootin' round. We'll nip him yet."

"But how? We can't venture to spy on him."

"Don't you know that I've got as sharp a spy as the city holds? That boy of mine's a regular weasel. I've sent him off now on the scout. Just you believe me that Firefly Jack won't make many steps without Harry knowing them."

Two hours afterward the boy scout returned. He reported that Jack was at home, and seemed inclined to spend the day there.

Just before dark Harry was sent out again. They thought it likely that Jack might be on the move after night. A place was fixed where he could report to them after dark.

Darkness settled over the city. It was a cloudy and drizzly night. Few people were abroad. Under the shed of one of the wharves on Delaware avenue stood two men, with heavy coats buttoned up to the chin, and caps well drawn down on their brows.

"It's goin' to be a mighty rough night," said the hoarse voice of Jerry. "D'ye hear the ratle o' that wind in the sheds? A reg'lar easterly gale. There ought to be a swoopin' high tide."

"I hope the boy will hit the mark. It's a good night for our work. Once settle the hash of the little rascal that we owe so much to, and then I'm ready to emigrate West at a minute's notice."

A half-hour passed. Then a slight form appeared in the light of a street-lamp, hurrying through the darkness.

"Where away?" he cried cautiously.

"Here away!"

The men stepped out from their lurking-place.

"Things is prime," cried the spy. "I track-ed him down this way. He's jist ahead of us. Foller me."

They hastened after him, their faces lighting up with murderous hope.

Hurrying onward they soon caught sight of a slender figure, proceeding leisurely down the avenue.

"That's him," whispered Harry.

"All right. You scoot, Harry. We're done with you now."

They followed the unconscious boy, with the stealthy step of experienced scouts. It was indeed Firefly Jack in advance. He was whistling a lively tune. Not a shadow of dread was on his young spirit. And yet murder was lurking behind him.

Suddenly a hand fell on his shoulder, gripping his coat firmly.

Quick as lightning Jack looked upward and backward. He caught sight of two scowling faces, one of which he recognized at a glance. He caught sight the same instant of an uplifted arm, holding a short, stout club. It was already descending sharply toward his head.

The threatened boy ducked to the pavement. At the same instant he squirmed out of his coat, leaving it in the hand of his assailant. The swinging club shot harmlessly over his head.

A quick dart, and he was half-way across the street. The men followed, with oaths of rage and fury.

Out to the wharf he ran. It was No. 10, the scene of his former adventure. They followed, thinking they had him in a trap. But in a minute the boy had reached the spot of his plunge with Minny. Without a moment's hesitation he sprung into the water again. It closed over his head, and swallowed him up.

His pursuers came up, looking fiercely into the water.

"It's the very spot where he dished me before, with the baby," cried Jerry. "There's some confounded game here. I'm goin' to investigate."

"We must have him out, if we tear the wharf down."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEN OF DEATH.

WHAT WAS the mystery of the wharf? That is a question which the reader may have asked some time back, and which deserves an answer.

If the curious reader will take an underground plunge we may be able to fathom the mystery.

The wharf, in fact, was an old one, and not in the soundest condition. Beneath its surface was a large open space, utterly unknown to the teamsters and others who made it the scene of their daily traffic. A series of stout cross-logs covered this space and held up the earth above. But below was an opening, from four to five feet deep, and about ten by twenty feet in dimensions. It was paved with hard earth, and above the reach of ordinary tides, though not of very high tides.

This space was fitted up with benches and stools, and had a table in its center. All these were roughly made, but they answered their purpose. Over the cold ground a thick layer of old matting had been stretched. Altogether the place looked cosey and comfortable.

And just now it was occupied. Three or four boys, of the street Arab type, were seated around the table, enjoying a cold collation which had been spread upon it.

Among these river guests were two whom we already know. One was Hans, the Dutch boy. The other was no less a person than Minny Logan, the waif of the river. The mystery of Jack's plunge was accounted for. It was hither he had borne his prize. In this secure retreat he had left her safe from all harm.

"Wonder what's come of Jack?" queried one of the boys. "He ain't been here these two nights. And Minny's gettin' down-hearted 'cause he don't come."

"Me wants to see Jack," she lisped, with a mouthful of cake. "Me likes you, but me likes Jack bestest."

"Shoo you don't mind! Jack's all right," declared Hans.

At that moment there came a splashing sound. All eyes were directed toward a pool of dark water, at the outer edge of the retreat, on which the light of the lamp fell with a glimmer.

A head appeared in the midst of the splashing waves. Then a form emerged.

"Jack!" cried the boys in concert. "What's the matter?" They sprung hastily to their feet.

"The Old Nick's the matter. They're arter me sharp. I had to jump for it, and came in by the water gate."

He was shaking the water from his dripping clothes.

"Who's after you?"

"The murderers."

"Der tuyfel!" cried Hans, in alarm. "Den I'm shoost goin' out."

He ran back to the rear end of the space, and pulled open a sort of rough door that appeared there.

"Hold yer level, Dutchy," cried Jack. "Time enough to run when we see the hounds.—Hey, Minny," he cried, to the child who had been trying to attract his attention. "How's my sweetheart?"

"You's wet, Jack."

"Don't you touch me, little gal."

He caught her up in his two hands, and lifted her in the air, kissing her sweet mouth. The happy child crowded with pleasure at seeing her friend again.

"Dunno whether we'll fool 'em this time or not," said Jack. "Guess they'll smell a rat. But it's goin' to be a high tide. It's runnin' up mighty lively now. They'll have to stir up if they want to get in by the water gate."

He continued to play with Minny as he spoke.

"That's so," said one of the other boys. "Look how high the water in the corner's gettin'. We'll be drowned out if it keeps rising."

"Looks like it," answered Jack. "Slip out, Tom, and see what they're arter."

The boy addressed turned toward the door which Hans had opened. He disappeared beyond it. He was absent about five minutes. Then he reappeared by the same passage.

"They smell a rat," he said excitedly. "Here's two of them. They've got a boat and are probing the wharf outside. Right over the opening too. They're bound to hit it."

"Let 'em," cried Jack defiantly.

Tom darted back again. This time he was absent some two or three minutes. He came rushing back in intense excitement.

"They've found it!" he cried. "They're going for us! One of them was lowering himself out of the boat."

"Shall we stay here and fight 'em?" asked Jack valiantly.

"No. They're two strong men. We're only boys. And we've got Minny, too. Let's scoot and pass the word to the police."

Jack looked at the faces of the boys. He saw at a glance he would have poor backing in a fight. Hans was trembling already. With a sneer the indignant boy picked up Minny.

"We mought ha' downed 'em while they was gettin' the water out o' the'r eyes," he said. "You take the little 'un, Tom. I'm too soaked. Now let's ge' ready for a break. If we slip the bolt they kin never git through. We'll have 'em like mice in a trap."

The boys crowded back, through the strong doorway. Jack followed them. But he waited in the doorway. He wanted to make sure of his ground.

The next moment a shaggy head rose out of the water. It was Jerry's face, on which fell the light of the lamp in the boy's hand.

The ruffian dashed the water from his eyes and looked around him in surprise. A growl of satisfaction came to his lips as he caught sight of Jack in the doorway.

"I've got you now, you sprout. See if I don't salt you!"

"Got to b'lie your 'tater, 'fore you kin swaller it," retorted Jack.

The ruffian began to tramp out of the water. He still held the murderous club in his hand. At this instant a second head popped up, close beside him.

"That's the king bee," cried Jack. "Won't they git sweetly sold, though!"

He sprung into the passage and closed the door sharply behind him. It displayed a stout iron bolt, which he slid into the strong table.

"Come ahead," he cried through the door. "Don't think ye'll bu'st this easy. Hope you've got a pocket full of dry matches, 'cause it's dark in there."

He proceeded, by the light of the lamp, along the passage. It was very narrow, and led back between the wharf-logs, for some ten feet. Here it ended at a point where the lamp-light fell on the dark surface of the water. It was an opening between the wharf-logs, high enough to be above the tidal level.

Jack extinguished his lamp.

"Are you above there?" he asked.

"Yes. All O. K."

"Then here comes."

He crept through the narrow opening. It was just wide enough to let him easily through. Reaching upward he caught a spike in the wharf-logs. By the aid of this he pulled himself out. The surface of the wharf was but about three feet above him, and was easily gained by the aid of a row of spikes. In a minute Jack was standing beside his comrades on the wharf.

"They're in our den," he cried. "I waited to guv 'em some slack. Then I bolted the door, and left 'em in the dark. We've got 'em caged, boys. You run up, Tom, and guv the alarm to the fu'st cop you see. You take the little gal, Dutchy, and carry her home. 'Tain't fit fur her here. We'll wait."

Jack's orders were obeyed. Five minutes passed. All was deathly still.

"Wonder how they like it in there?" he queried.

"Must be cold quarters."

He walked to the end of the wharf and looked over.

"My, if we ain't goin' to catch a swoopin' tide! It's comin' up an inch a minute. The hole must be filled up by this time. I bet it'll overflow our headquarters. Hope they'll get a sweet soakin'."

He turned back again toward his companions. Several more minutes passed before Tom returned. There accompanied him a sturdy policeman.

The story was quickly told. There was no difficulty in making the officer believe it, for he well knew the fact that the boys had a retreat under the wharf. It was known to the wharf owner, who had directed that they should not be disturbed.

"The murderers!" cried the officer, on hearing Jack's story. "This is important. You have them safely caged! They must not escape. Do you boys keep here on the watch. I will go for help. One of you jump into that boat and row it away. They might give us the slip by using it."

This was no sooner said than done. One of the boys sprung into the boat, loosened the rope that was fastened to a spike, and pushed off.

"I tell you this wind's fetchin' the tide up racin'" he cried. "The hole's deep under. It must be up to the floor of the retreat inside now. They can't get out this way. The man that tries it will be drowned."

He rowed the boat round the wharf.

Five more minutes passed ere the policeman returned. The tide was rising with abnormal rapidity.

Several men accompanied the officer. A short conversation ensued.

"Can a man get in by your passage?" asked the officer.

"No. It's only big enough for a boy."

"Nobody'll git in that way to-night," said Jack.

"Why?"

"Cause the tide's over it. Look here. The water's runnin' in. The gentlemen inside stand a chance of gettin' a soakin'."

"A soakin'?" cried the officer excitedly. "They'll be drowned! If this tide rises much further nothing will save them. How high is the roof of your retreat?"

"Up to 'bout here," said Jack, reaching down the side of the wharf.

"Then the water has to rise more than two feet yet to reach the top."

"It won't do that," said one of the men. "It's near high tide now. This wind may lift it a foot more, but that'll be the limit."

"They'll get a good scare, anyhow; and that they ought to have. But I wouldn't care to see them drowned, and the gallows cheated of its due."

There was one thing, however, which these gentlemen did not take into account. We will have to return to the chamber under the wharf to see just how things are going on there.

That Jack's pursuers were nonplussed on being left in the dark, need not be said. They debated for a moment if they should return the way they came.

But the revengeful instinct was too strong. They left the water and sought for the door of escape. This they could not readily find in the dark. After some effort, Jerry managed to light a match which he had in his pocket. The door was now plainly visible. But to their dismay, they found it impossible to open it. Thrust and beat as they would, it resisted their efforts.

A lapping sound drew their attention from the door. They looked hastily around. To their dismay they saw the water of the river flowing over the floor of their retreat. The opening by which they had entered was obliterated.

They looked at one another with staring eyes.

"Caught!" cried Jerry, hoarsely.

"How much higher will the tide rise?"

"It's about high tide now."

"Then we'll have to wait till it falls, and dive out through the hole."

But, to their dismay, the water continued to rise. Inch by inch, inch by inch. The whole floor was covered. Deeper and deeper. Six inches of water lay on it. It rose to a foot. The rising continued. The caged villains grew white. The dark shadow of terror filled their eyes.

"It must stop soon," cried Jerry. "It's a foot above high-tide mark now."

Yet still the rising continued, and with an abnormal rapidity. All the water of the river seemed sweeping into that cage.

And now a new peril appeared. They began to breathe heavily, and a constricting pain crept round their heads.

In fact, the space above the water was greatly reduced, and it was an air-tight space. The small volume of air that remained was being rapidly poisoned by their breath. In ten minutes more it would be fit for no human being to breathe.

The minutes passed. The pain around their heads now became a constriction as of an iron band. Their veins throbbed. Their faces swelled with dark blood. They staggered where they stood.

A howl of pain and terror came from their swollen lips. An insane rage broke out in Jerry's brain. He struck out in the darkness with all the force of his iron fists.

The blow met the head of his companion, who fell like a log into the dark water.

Jerry toppled with the force of his blow, sought to catch his steps, staggered and fell, while a last yell of terror burst from his lips.

And still the dark waves flowed in. Still the tide swelled. The howl of the avenging wind penetrated even to that den of death. It was like the requiem of nature over its deadly work.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT THE WHARF CAVE REVEALED.

THE tide continued to rise. The wind blew with a sharp wail up the stream, driving and heaping the waves before it. It was such a tide as had not been known for ten years. Two hours after the time for high tide passed, and yet the waters had not begun to fall.

The men at the wharf looked at one another with serious eyes. A considerable crowd had collected, excited by the news, which gradually spread, that two men were caught by the rising waters under the wharf. And when the story got adrift as to who these men were the excitement grew more intense.

It seemed as if the hand of God had interposed, to punish the murderers for their deed.

"Can they live through it?" was the question.

"The Lord knows. The water will not reach their heads. But it is a chance if they do not smother."

"Small loss, anyhow," growled a harsh waterman. "It will save the city the cost of a rope to hang them."

Three more hours passed. The tide was now rapidly falling. The wild waters sunk, inch by inch, until the boy's entrance to the wharf cave was revealed. It continued to fall.

"Is it safe to go in?" asked the policeman.

"If a chap don't mind a little mud."

"But no man can enter. Where are those boys? They know the ropes."

Jack, who had been home to dry his clothes, but had lately come back, answered:

"Git me a light, somebody. I'll try it. It's risky though. They're desperate fellers."

"I fancy the spirit is taken out of them," rejoined the policeman.

"Will you go with me, Tom?"

"Yes. I ain't afraid."

A lamp was soon procured, and the two young adventurers swung themselves over the wharf log, and climbed down to the entrance to their den. This they slipped through, and stood in the narrow avenue.

The light of the lamp fell on a drenched and slimy scene. The water yet oozed from every pore of the passage. The logs were covered with yellow mud.

Jack led the way, with a heart beating rather higher than usual. What was before him? Were his foes dead, or were they crouching like cornered brutes, waiting their time for revenge?

He reached the door. It was still firmly bolted. All was deathly still within.

Jack looked back at his companion.

"What do you think 'bout it?" he whispered.

"Let's hale them," answered Tom. "If we opened the door they might make a rush on us."

Jack took his advice. He struck the door with his fist.

"Hello, in there!" he shouted.

No sound came in answer. The boys waited for a minute in suspense.

"Hey!" cried Jack again. "Man yer pipes and let's hear from you."

Silence still ruled. Only a hollow echo came back to the boys' ears.

They looked at one another with serious eyes.

"Wonder if they ain't kicked the bucket?"

"Looks like it."

"Stand by for a rush, Tom. I'm goin' to open the door anyway."

In a moment he had slipped back the strong bolt. A push with his foot, and the door swung open. The light of the lamp penetrated to the damp den. The boys looked eagerly forward. The water had retreated, yet the floor was covered with a thick slime. But no sign was visible of the men.

"Where are they?" asked Jack, in a low tone.

"Could they have slid?"

"Tain't possible," answered Tom, with a look of horror. "Ha! see yonder!"

They had advanced through the door, and the light now illuminated the whole space.

There, in the remote corner, lay the forms of the two men, one thrown across the other and both covered with a thick deposit of the slimy mud.

The face of one was downward, but the other had his face turned upward. It was masked with the mud, but through it all could be seen the horrible aspect of death. It was the lifeless countenance of Reece Logan, the wife-murderer!

The boys had seen enough. They turned and hastily left the place. When they reached the wharf again their faces appeared as if they had seen a ghost.

The tale of horror was soon told. A thrill of excitement passed through the assembled crowd. How were the dead bodies to be got out? This was the next question which occupied the throng.

They could not be brought through the passage which the boys had just traversed. The difficulty was finally settled by their being thrust through the water opening to the cave, and caught by some men who had brought around the boat.

In a few minutes more they were laid upon the wharf. The water had washed the mud from their faces. There they lay, with dead, white, staring faces turned up to the sky, an awful warning to the evil-doer, dead in their sins.

With the dawn of the next day the story of the night was spread far and wide through the city, exciting a shudder wherever it was read. Retribution had fallen with a heavy weight on the murderers' heads. The slaughtered woman had been avenged. Heaven's justice had replaced man's justice, and crime had met with its due reward.

It was ten o'clock in the morning. Jack was on the point of going out, with the intention of calling on Mr. Bronson, when a knock came at the house-door. On opening it the benevolent face of that individual appeared.

His countenance showed signs of anger and excitement.

"Why did you not come and tell me of last night's work?" he sharply demanded. "Here I was left to find it out from the newspapers."

"I was just startin'," rejoined Jack sturdily. "It's easy talkin', Mr. Bronson, but if you'd been through all I went through last night I reckon you wouldn't feel like turnin' out afore ten this mornin'."

The gentleman's look grew milder as he gazed on the boy's earnest face.

"Tell me all about it," he asked. "The papers have got it twisted I suppose. They generally do."

Jack told his story to a very interested audience,

for his mother and the children formed an open-mouthed circle at some distance from the gentleman, and there was many a cry of horror and excitement as the tale went on.

"Well, well, I declare!" cried Mr. Bronson, when Jack had ended. "I never heard anything more terrible. Caught like rats, and drowned in their sins! Well, well! And this poor little thing. She is the innocent daughter of that dreadful man!"

He caught Minny between his knees, and looked with warm interest into her soft blue eyes.

"Poor, dear little orphan! I have learned something about you, my child. You have lost father and mother, but you will not suffer from want. I have learned the whole story, Jack," he continued. "I received an answer to my telegram this morning."

"You won't mind telling me all about it?" demanded Jack.

"Certainly not. I don't know who has a better right to know. You have been a bold and brave and wide-awake boy. You have fully earned your reward. As for Minny, she is a young lady of property."

"I'm glad to hear that, anyhow."

"Waif, I'll tell you all about it. You won't mind hearing, Mrs. Jarvis?"

"I don't know anything I want to hear worse," declared the good woman.

"Well, this is the story," answered Mr. Bronson, with a smile. "It appears that Reece Logan married Jennie Mayland, at Little Rock, Arkansas. She was the only daughter of a doctor, in good circumstances. Logan behaved himself very respectfully until after the marriage, and till the death of his father-in-law, which took place soon afterward. His object apparently was to keep on the right side of the invalid, with the hope of sharing in his property."

"When the will was read it appeared that the doctor's estate was all left to his daughter without restriction. Soon after that her husband showed his cloven foot. He had played respectable too long for his temper. He fell into his old practice of gambling, and as he lost, which he frequently did, he brought a severe pressure on his wife to supply him with money.

"The poor thing had lost all love for him, but for peace she yielded to his demands, until she began to fear that her whole fortune would be dissipated, and her child left penniless. Then, under the advice of an old friend of her father's, she refused to supply her evil husband with any more cash.

"From this time on the poor thing led a dreadful life. But she was firm that not a cent more of her principal would be touched. The most she would consent to was to give him the interest of her estate. This went on for a year or two. The reckless fellow appears to have got himself deeply into debt. Two months ago he left Little Rock, taking his wife and child with him. That is the last the people out there know of him. Where he stayed during the interval before coming here we cannot well find out."

"He come through Bungtown. I know that," muttered Jack. "But what did he kill his wife, and want to kill his baby for?"

"To inherit her estate. The police have been busy this morning, and have found out some things. They have discovered his hiding-place, and obtained his papers. They know the whole scheme. It seems that he induced his wife to make a will, leaving the property to her daughter, under his management. If the daughter should die it all went to him. The poor woman did not dream of the depth of villainy in her husband's vile heart."

"But I dunno what he was to make by murderin' the woman."

"That was not the only paper," replied Mr. Bronson. "They found also certificates of the death and burial of his wife. I don't know how he obtained them, but he had them. Somebody has been buried in her name. He would have managed the same thing for his daughter, no doubt. With these papers and the will there could be no suspicion, and no one could hinder him from taking possession of the property."

"The dreadful villain!" exclaimed Mrs. Jarvis, holding up both hands. "To think of it! Thank the stars he got drowned! And Minny will be rich, then!"

"She will be worth some fifty thousand dollars. As for your boy, Mrs. Jarvis, he has earned some money. I owe him the reward for the discovery of the murderer. There is a reward from the hospital also."

"Half of it goes to Dutchy," answered Jack sturdily. "I promised, and I ain't goin' back on it."

"That's right, my boy. I intend to look after you and Dutchy. It is high time you were in some business, instead of wasting your life about the streets."

"Heaven knows it's been a sore trial to me," murmured Mrs. Jarvis.

"How would you like to learn the jewelry business? I can get you a good place at that. And with your sharp fingers and brains you're just the boy to pick it up."

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"I s'pose you're right. But it'll go hard to tie myself down. I won't go back on it, though, if you say the word."

"That's right, my boy! And your small fortune shall be invested. It may help you to a start in life when you grow up."

Within a week from that time Jack was at work, the only steady work he had ever done in his life.

It went hard with him at first; but there was

something in the business that he took a fancy to, and he soon settled down to steady labor.

Mr. Bronson also took Hans out of the stable, and got him into a situation better suited to his abilities. The boy was not afraid of work, and though he had not Jack's brains, was not wanting in industry.

And so we must leave our gamins to make their way in life. As for Minny Logan she was taken West, and put in charge of a cousin of her murdered mother.

It was hard for her and Jack to part. They had taken a most enduring fancy to each other. In fact, the boy still keeps up a correspondence with his little friend, who is now growing into a large and lovely girl. She has by no means lost her fancy for him, nor her interest in the story of how he saved her from drowning and revenged the death of her mother.

Folks who know them say that it will be a match yet between the flourishing jeweler, Jack Jarvis, and his no longer little friend. But that only time can prove.

THE END.

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